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By Robert J. Kelly



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**JIM-UNCLASSIFIED**



# JIM—UNCLASSIFIED

*A Romance*

BY

ROBERT J. KELLY



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TO  
JEFFERY FARNOL  
MY LITERARY GODFATHER  
I DEDICATE

THESE FRUITS OF HIS ENCOURAGEMENT,  
AS A MARK OF MY SINCERE GRATITUDE  
FOR HIS SYMPATHETIC INTEREST

R. J. K.



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BOOK I  
THE PRINCE



# JIM—UNCLASSIFIED

## CHAPTER I

### WHAT'S WRIT IS WRIT

ONE Sunday afternoon in the fall of the year in which I became seven years old, Father was sitting with old Mister Blay in the creeper covered summer-house at the bottom of the garden, and I was sitting on the step, watching an ant that was trying to drag a small centipede along the garden path. I remember now the glory of the hollyhocks in the old garden, how the air seemed full of a drowsy, lazy warmth and from the flower beds arose a faint incessant hum of bustling insect life, while the trees that covered the hills behind the house shone like beaten bronze and gold in the early autumn sunlight. My father at that time was an innkeeper, and Mister Blay frequently spent Sunday afternoons with him; and always when the weather was warm enough they sat either in the summer-house or on the seat under the great apple tree in the middle of the grass plot, with a tankard of ale at hand for Mister Blay's refreshment. Young as I was I knew Father was not fond of the

old man, but Mother, who was always master, insisted that Father entertain him, and Father, not without complaint, gave in. Mother and old Bill Blay had been fellow servants at the great house whose owner was overlord of the surrounding country for many miles; he had been coachman to old Sir James when she was maid to Lady Lorrilow, the parents of the baronet who now reigned over his broad acres from his retreat in sunny Italy, and when she gave up service to marry Father none could be found, among her fellow servants, to desire her acquaintance except the poor, old, discarded coachman. And so he came to sit and gossip in the garden on warm Sunday afternoons.

On this day in particular I heard Father get up from his seat with an angry snort, and fall to pacing heavily up and down the summer-house floor. Fearing I might be in the way, I crossed to the gooseberry bush and after filling my small mouth with a great bursting, luscious fruit, turned and faced the summer-house. Father had by now left the old man and was stalking with his hands behind his back down the garden towards the house. Old Bill Blay's face was hidden by the foot of his tankard, but he presently emerged and, after wiping the back of his hand across his mouth, beckoned to me.

“ Jim,” said he, “ come here.”

I approached him, wondering, until I stood within the leafy portals of the summer-house, when taking my arm in a grip which he meant to be tender, he drew me to him and gazed into my eyes in a searching manner.

"B'y," he said, "you're born for trubble."

"Yes, Mister Blay?" I meekly answered.

"Sure enough," he continued, "born for trubble as the sparks do fly upwards. Jim, b'y, them eyes o' yourn will see a 'eap o' sorrer afore they ever gets the laughin' wrinkles round 'em."

I began to feel sorry for myself by now, and the more I watched the old man's face the keener grew my self-pity, till at last the question that troubled my heart burst wofully from my lips.

"Why, Mister Blay? Why should I see a lot of sorrow?"

"Because it's writ there, b'y, and what's writ is writ and you can't get away from it."

"But ain't I a good boy, Mister Blay?" I ventured in protest.

"None better, Jim," he answered, shaking his head, mournfully, "but it's allus so with your sort. A happy man or woman was never born the way you was. 'Ard it do seem that the innercent should be made to suffer, but the sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children's writ in the book, and what's writ there is truth, you can take my word for it."

A long pause, while the wondering eyes of innocence gazed into the veiled eyes of knowledge. Then innocence in a tear-choked voice spoke again.

“Wasn’t I born like other little boys, Mister Blay?”

“Most on ‘em waits till they’re wanted,” he replied gruffly.

“Didn’t I do that?”

No answer was vouchsafed to my question as my companion hunted his pockets in search of a match, so I ventured to repeat it. My persistence seemed to rouse something within him so that he gave me an apprehensive look.

“Jim,” he said, coaxingly, “you’re a good b’y. Go and fetch me a match.”

So, seeing that the gates of knowledge were closed, I turned and followed in the footsteps of my father down the garden path.

The garden was my chief delight from my earliest recollection. I loved it fervently and lived in it from morning until night and, although I had no one who could tell me the names of the flowers and shrubs, I knew exactly how they grew, their formation and habits, and every creeping and flying thing that visited them. Whenever I could find a piece of paper and a stub of pencil it was my passion to make little drawings of my flower friends as I knew them, and when in later years I saw my baby efforts with matured eyes, I realised

that even then I had possessed a keenness of perception and a sense of form far beyond that of children more than twice my age. But to-day as I trod my Eden on my errand I saw none of it. I even kicked my tortoise over so that he sprawled on his back with legs waving in the air, and tarried not to pick him up, so full was my mind of a keen sense of injustice in that I was born the way I was. I found myself in the passage ere I remembered what I had come there for, and a sound of voices in the bar parlour drove my errand once more out of my mind. Father's was the first I heard.

"That's what you always say, but you're not so charitable with everybody," he declared.

Mother answered him in a high-pitched, sarcastic tone.

"Indeed! What a pity I didn't ask your permission!"

"I don't see why I should be expected to keep him," Father retorted, "the lazy old ruffian! His score's over two pounds and he never offers to pay."

"Have you asked him?"

"Asked him! You know he always says he'll pay on quarter day, and when that comes he says he didn't get it."

"He doesn't always get it now, for her Ladyship won't pay it when Sir Edward is away."

“She’s got more sense than some women I know.”

“Oh, has she? You needn’t remind me how little I had when I married you.”

“Huh! the older you get the less you have.”

“Are you going to give it him?”

“No!”

“Then give it to me and I’ll take it to him myself.”

“But my dear —”

“Give it to me I say!”

“Oh, very well, but it’s the last he’ll have. I’ll tell him —”

“You’ll tell him nothing.”

“Oh! have your own way then,” and Father opened the door angrily and I was face to face with him.

“What are you doing here?” he blustered.

“I’m looking for some matches for Mister Blay,” I answered, falteringly.

Thereupon he seized me by the arm, and administered three hefty clouts around my poor head.

“You story-telling young blackguard,” he roared, “you *were* listening. I’ll teach you to lie to me.”

The tears by now were falling thick and fast and my sobs all but made me unintelligible. “I wasn’t, Father; oh, I wasn’t listening!” I protested.

What further would have happened to me I do not know, and truth to tell I fear to speculate, so violent was he, with great purple veins standing high upon his temples, flashing eyes and wet protruding under lip. I verily believe he would have maimed me had not my mother at my cries come quickly to my rescue. She sprang through the door and on to me like a tiger cat and snatched me from the arms of my executioner and turned on him so that he withered, as wool does when you put it in a flame.

“ You cowardly brute! ” she whispered, hoarsely, in a strained voice.

Thankful for the respite, I clung to her skirts, and folded in her encircling arms my tears and howls of terror changed to those of self-pity, and secure in the protection of my deliverer increased tenfold in volume. I could feel that her whole being trembled and her bosom heaved with the intensity of her breathing as she fixed him with her eyes and dared him to touch me. In a moment she had regained her fluency of speech and she lit into him in a manner that seared his marrow for many a day.

“ You brute! ” she screamed. “ You brute! You hulking bully! You dare to strike my child! You dare! ”

And what with her staccato screams and my crescendo sobs the place was pandemonium itself,

so Father, sucking in his under lip with never a word to either of us, took the matches off the mantelpiece and putting them in his pocket went sulkily back to the garden.

There is no place in this wide and dreary world where the wounded, tender heart of a boy can find so much comfort as in the lap of his mother. I nestled to her bosom and sobbed my sorrow out, the while she crooned over me, rocking me gently to and fro until a great peace warmed my tortured soul and melted my hardened heart, so that I was near to tears again for very joy.

Thus we sat silent for full a minute. I felt for my handkerchief but finding it not, my mother wiped my eyes herself with her own little piece of cambric. Then looking into her face, which I now held between my hands, I asked her, coaxingly:

“Mummie, what did Mister Blay mean when he said, ‘What is writ is writ’?”

“What on earth are you talking about, child?” she demanded, suspiciously.

“That’s what he said, mummy,” and patting her cheek tenderly I followed it up like the blind little innocent I was. “And why, mummy dear, why was I born different to other little boys?”

I think if the house had fallen about my ears at that moment or the earth had opened and swallowed me, I would have been less surprised, and

certainly less hurt, at the effect of my questioning; for my mother sprang upright so suddenly as to send me headlong from her lap, so that I rolled on the floor until I brought up, a huddled heap, against the sideboard legs.

She towered above me for a moment, glaring at me wide-eyed and open mouthed, then pulling herself together with an expression that froze my heart she was on me with a bound, and taking me by my shoulders led me weeping and unwilling to my bedroom, where she locked me in and strode off without a word.

## CHAPTER II

### FROM PARADISE TO HELL

HAVING left the grammar school at the age of fourteen with a modicum of French and Latin and a thorough grounding of science, heathen mythology and mathematics, my father considered me fit to do battle with the world; so I was put to doing the odd jobs about the house. I must confess, that it was with an aching heart that I scrubbed the bar floors and kept them sanded, polished the windows, the pewter and the brasswork, cleaned the pots and measures and took out bottles of beer in a basket crate to customers. I was a sensitive child and the degradation of my lot bit into my soul with an indescribable fierceness, for I had done well at school and had fondly hoped that I would be put to something wherein my native talent would have a chance to blossom. And so it was that I looked forward with a wild longing to the coming of Tuesdays, when I had an afternoon off and my time was all my own from one o'clock onwards.

It had been my habit to devote these hours of freedom to rambles in the woods, and frequently I had hurried to a certain secluded spot beside a

chattering brook, and throwing myself down upon the grass sobbed out my sorrows to that sweet mother of us all, in whose confidence there is no betrayal and who, at last, takes us, worn and weary, to her bosom and rocks us to sleep. But latterly, either because I was becoming hardened to my lot, or, because of the inward calling of some great power as yet unknown to me, I had ceased repining and, with a shilling box of paints which I had surreptitiously procured, had spent those blessed hours in feeding my poor starving mind with the food for which it craved.

Now it happened that on a certain Tuesday I was busily engaged, with my foot upon the bottom step of the flight that led from the back of the house to the garden, polishing my boots preparatory to taking my weekly excursion, whistling busily in pure joy at the anticipation, when I became aware of a certain hat coming towards me along the top of the oaken fence that separated our garden from the road. It was a tall and shiny hat of intense brilliance, so brilliant, indeed, that it hurt my eyes to gaze upon it, and the gloss was not the gloss of youth but rather that of extreme senility. As I looked at it my heart leaped and I ceased whistling and stood upright, awaiting its approach. Presently it came opposite to where I stood, and stopping, turned so that it faced me, then a pair of hands with long, thin,

sensitive and knotty fingers, took a hold on the top of the fence. There came a scuffling sound against the oak, and the hat rose painfully, higher and higher, until first a halo of white curls appeared beneath, then a pair of dark, piercing, but very kindly eyes under two shaggy eyebrows, and a nose long and sharp but bulbous at the tip, and a very cataract of white moustache, from the depths of which a deep, rich, but somewhat quavery voice greeted me.

“Oh! Prince Arthur, what makes you cease so suddenly?”

“I was watching your hat, Mister Pond.”

“My hat? Prithee, little prince, is my poor hat so poor that e'en the lark will cease his warbling at the sight thereof?”

“No, Mister Pond, but I was pleased to see you coming.”

“Well said, my young and noble prince, well said.”

Now Alexander Hannibal Pond was the only friend I possessed, young as I was, old as he was.

He was a native of the village who long years ago had been lured to London by his passion for the stage; but London and the stage had dealt harshly with him so that there was nothing left for him save memory, with imagination to help it. By most he was accounted mad; but to me

there was something in his eyes which struck an answering chord within my heart, and I read in their passionate fires the light of genius. He lived in London still, how, nobody knew nor cared. He came to his native village frequently to see his brother who was lodgekeeper at Ravenhurst; and while here spent his evenings in the private bar of our house. And when the liquor was in him he was a source of great merriment to the other frequenters of the bar, because at those times his memory would sometimes carry him back to long forgotten triumphs, so that he would ramp and gesticulate wildly, dramatically, reciting whole pages of Hamlet or Julius Cæsar to detriment of the glasses and bar fittings.

Now his kindly old face filled me with great joy because I knew that he was coming with me on my ramble, and to have his company was to see things with different eyes, to get a better perspective on the country side so that it loomed more beautiful because of him. At such times my sketching outfit was left at home, hidden in my potshed, and I usually carried in its stead a light cane and a toy pistol, the latter a model I very much prized because at a little distance it was indistinguishable from a genuine weapon. These were my "props" and desperate indeed were the duels we fought in the seclusion of the woods, but though we played many parts together and doughty were the deeds

we did perform, his chief delight was to cast me for Prince Arthur, and himself for Hubert.

Oh, those Tuesday afternoons of ever blessed memory!

So, having duly finished my toilet and armed myself according to tradition, behold us by the singing brook, knee deep in bluebells, with my arm about his waist and his around my shoulder, while I listened to the tales of his triumphs as we sauntered to our rendezvous.

Now, though deeply engrossed in what he was telling me, my keen eyes were attracted by something less than a yard to my right. I stopped suddenly, for what I had seen was a hare sitting hunched up in the bracken with ears laid flat and great, black, frightened eyes that seemed to stare at nothing. I advanced to seize it, whereat it gave a great bound and was gone across the clearing. Giving a view halloo I was after it in a flash with my companion in close pursuit. For a time it would be lost in a clump of bracken, and then it would appear again crossing an open glade to its next retreat, and, being a young and innocent fool, I followed at top speed.

On and on I blundered, joyously, over fallen trees, through high beds of bracken, shouting for sheer joy in my desire; and far behind old Alec came complainingly, calling upon me to stop, for the pace was too much for him. Suddenly my feet

encountered an obstacle, something soft and yielding, hidden in the undergrowth; and being brought up sharp as to my lower extremities, and continuing my wild flight with my upper, I pitched headlong on my face.

It was as if I had stumbled on a portal of the underworld, for my fall was accompanied by such a sulphurous stream of profanity as to fill my mind with terror. It was such a mixture of idioms as I have never heard before or since, French, and something that sounded like Italian, real American curses from the Golden Gate and sailor slang in broken English. My face blanched that any man could say such things and live! So I sat and faced around, awestruck and fascinated, to see the being that dared to utter such blasphemies; and there, sitting up likewise and facing me, was a tattered man with face as brown as our bar counter, long black hair that streamed in rats' tails over his brow, short black beard that but intensified the gleaming whiteness of his teeth, and fierce black eyes that glared at me, vilely and ferociously.

As I gazed of a sudden his ferocity left him, like a violent tempest quickly spent, his expression softened and intense surprise and recognition were in its stead. We sat for near a minute and he it was who broke the spell. Arising quickly he approached me with a smile which I liked even less than his frown, so cunning was it and full of evil

portent, such a smile as a snake might show to its victim ere it strikes.

“ Ha ! ” he said, “ my little friend, you do not know me, hey ? ”

“ No,” I answered, suspiciously, “ I don’t.”

“ Dat is ver natural,” he responded, “ I ’ave seen you not since you wos so ’igh,” and he indicated my former height with his hand.

“ Oh ! ” I replied, in a not very encouraging tone.

Although his smile was full of honey, his eyes glowed, cruelly. A moment or two later he tried another tack.

“ Is your moder keeping well ? ” he asked, sweetly.

“ My mother is nothing to you,” I told him. “ You mind your own business and leave me alone.”

He crawled to within a foot of me and lifting a dirty forefinger, wagged it threateningly near my face.

“ Don’t you go to play no Goddam stunts on me, my cock,” he said, warningly.

I recoiled from him with growing alarm, but he followed, still wagging his finger, so that, thinking it best to humour him, I stopped and answered.

“ What do you want with my mother ? ”

Suddenly he shot out his arm, and gripping the lapel of my coat, held me tight.

“ You are going to take me to her,” he hissed.

I clung to his waist and struggled to be free.

“ Let go! Let go! you dirty tramp! ” I cried and hit him in the mouth.

His pent up passion burst at that, his grip tightened on my coat and throwing his weight upon me he laid me down, then drawing a rough knife from a sheath slung at his back, he put it to my throat; so that I was near to faint with terror. What would have happened to me I cannot imagine had not his attention been attracted by a prodigious trampling in the bracken; he turned from me to see what caused it, and was confronted by an apparition such as I am sure he had never before beheld. A towering figure, lean and old, clad in an old brown ulster though it was the depth of summer, with long white locks surrounding the brim of an exceedingly shiny hat, and two eyes that flamed at him with all the ferocity of a tigress defending her young. A long lean arm uplifted held a stout and heavy stick.

“ How now, thou foul and scurvy knave,” my protector shouted. “ Be thou a spirit of Heaven or a Goblin damned I will cleave thee to the chine! ”

Waiting to hear no more the stranger loosed his hold on me, and springing to his feet leapt across the clearing and was lost in the nearest thicket; while I, shaken with my adventure, was sobbing

in the soothing embrace of the only soul I loved.

In due time sanity reascended the throne of reason, my unnatural emotion slowly subsided and I fell to wiping my eyes, smoothing down my ruffled hair and divesting my garments of many superfluous pieces of braken that had adhered to them in my fall. Seeing which my companion placed his arm around my shoulder once again, and we proceeded soberly through the woods.

Many were the threats he levelled at my late assailant should he ever meet him, and very earnestly did we discuss him; but who he was, whence he came, and whither he was bound, were to remain a mystery, at least for the remainder of the day.

After a while we climbed a wire fence and so found ourselves on a footpath running between two fields, on our left an unbroken vista of undulating grain, while to our right was tares spreading away to a thicket of firs, silver grey in a gathering mist. The path led over the brow of a low hill and descending crossed the main road half a mile away and led direct to the lodge gates of Ravenhurst.

As we approached a figure came toward us on our right, squat and portly, dressed in sober black, with a hard hewn face, and a square cut beard clipped close at the cheeks. The eyes were bright under shaggy brows, and there was that about

them that stirred some chord of memory so that he seemed familiar. My surprise was lessened when Alec waved his hand in introduction.

“ My prince, behold in yonder myrmidon your Hubert’s unworthy brother.”

“ Your brother, Mister Pond! ” I answered, as the other stopped at the gate and waited for us.

“ No other, Arthur, and by Heaven we are in luck! You have often wished to see the pictures and the great studio at Ravenhurst, and to-day — you shall! Wait here.”

“ Oh! Mister Pond! ” was all I could ejaculate, as he crossed the road to his brother.

Each greeted the other in his own manner; Alec effusive, gesticulative and affectionate; the other none too cordial, his whole form exuding disapproval the while his roving eye weighed up the glistening hat and the soiled boots.

After a little while the eloquence of the elder apparently prevailed, for the younger glanced across at me. Then Alec, patting his brother on the shoulder in a friendly fashion, waved his stick as a signal that I should approach.

Without further ado I crossed over and Alec introduced me to his brother.

“ This is the precious casket, George, from which the Heavenly spark, so long confined, will one day burst, dazzling and brilliant, upon an astonished world. And this, my little prince, is my

bountiful, my ever revered and most respected brother, George."

I do not know which was the most surprised at this unusual introduction, brother George or myself. He shook my hand in a perfunctory manner, though he could hardly restrain a smile as he did so, while I, awestruck at meeting the lodge-keeper of Ravenhurst, was very red at Alec's flattering eulogy.

"Innkeeper's son?" he questioned.

"Yes, sir."

"The Goat and Compasses?"

"Yes, sir."

"Fond of pictures?"

"Oh, yes, sir! I am indeed, sir."

"Know how to behave yourself?"

"I hope so, sir."

"Her Ladyship is away now or you wouldn't be allowed in," brother George continued. "I have to be very particular who I take into the house; but my brother says you are to be trusted, though you are the first village lad I ever heard that said of."

I was mute under his admonition but not so Alec. He struck an attitude expressive of his indignation and burst forth eloquently.

"Village lad! Village lad forsooth!! Breathes there a man with soul so dead who never to himself has said that this flower of the country side,

born as he is to blush unseen, will go down to his grave unknown, unhonoured and unsung! If so, out upon him! Out upon him, I say! George, the day will come when even you will grovel at his feet and call him Master!"

The other seemed quite cool under the scathing outburst, and unlocking the gate led us in.

"Alec, you're a fool," was all he said.

## CHAPTER III

### THE ANGEL AT THE GATES

THIS house, built in early Tudor times, had been the birthplace of a noble family. Squire had succeeded knight and been in turn elevated to knighthood, and even genius had appeared at long intervals; two great statesmen had honoured the race, a viceroy, and that famous soldier who had first earned for them the distinction of the bloody hand; but the greatest and most amazing of all was the last representative, who, picking up the strain from some long forgotten ancestor on his mother's side, or because of his innate aloofness and introspection had shone forth but one generation back the greatest painter of his time. Always a recluse in spirit he had never placed his work on public exhibition; but building himself a studio which was at the same time his gallery, because of its great vastness, he had covered its walls with treasures which were beyond the power of man to buy. Kings had come here and queens, famed for their beauty and graciousness, to be painted by his magic hand; and with few exceptions here they still were, a monument to his incomparable genius.

And I was to see them, to gaze with my own eyes on those famous pictures of which I had heard almost from my cradle!

So following in the wake of my elders I presently entered the lodge, and waited obediently on the edge of a chair, while they pledged eternal and fraternal fidelity in whisky and water.

Beholding me thus, Alec's great heart throbbed in solicitude and pouring some whisky into a tumbler he handed it to me.

"Most noble prince," he said, as he thrust the glass with trembling hand into my unwilling fist, "it is not meet that you should sit thus meek while wassail flows."

"Indeed, Alec," I answered, somewhat taken aback at this attention, "I am not old enough for that yet, and besides I might not like it."

However being overborne by their united persuasions I sipped the fiery liquid while he hovered about in sore distress, looking for all the world like a hen whose brood of ducklings is taking its first swim, so that, choking as I was, laughter mingled with my tears as they trickled down my face.

After that we went through the back door of the lodge and up the little garden, strolling along the path that ran between the kitchen garden and the shrubbery, then past the kennels vibrating with the music of their hungry occupants, and so

around by the stables until entering the big house by the huge kitchen, we mounted the back stairs to the studio.

My emotions at this supreme moment are now but a memory, but I know that never in my life before, not even in church, had I felt such an atmosphere of holiness surround me, so that I lost the power of speech, and stood silent, cap in hand, not daring to move from the patch of rug on which I found myself, and gazing with rapturous eyes at the wall before me.

My ecstasy was broken by a voice, the voice of the lodge keeper.

“What do you think of them, boy?” he asked.

“Oh, Mister Pond!” I replied softly, “I did not know the world could hold such things!”

“George,” broke in Alec, gripping my arm convulsively, his face abeam, “hear the voice of the planet calling to the sun!”

Something in his manner made a lump come into my throat, and breaking from him I ran to a chair beside a table and throwing myself into it buried my face in my hands and burst into choking sobs.

In the fulness of time I recovered my composure and, was very much ashamed of myself; but it was Alec who made my apologies for me.

“Our little prince is overwrought,” he explained. “A base and black browed varlet of a foreign hue attacked him in the woods yonder,

George, and but for my timely entrance would sure have done him injury."

Alec explained to me afterwards that in this he was playing up to the gallery, for had he attempted to describe to his brother what he knew to be the true cause of my emotion, not only would it have belittled me in that gentleman's estimation but would have angered him so as to seriously jeopardise a scheme he was concocting for his own financial benefit. As it was George grunted something about the woods swarming with gipsies, and taking my arm, he led me round the gallery, in a slow procession from canvas to canvas halting before every portrait of great lady or gallant squire, filling my unheeding ears with the family history of each; and it pleased him not at all that I had ever an ear for Alec's rhapsodies on what he styled technique, his brilliant discourses on drawing, composition, lighting and harmonies, the like of which I had never before heard. Indeed Alec's flights of oratory as he unfolded to me the deathless stories woven around the great mythological paintings thrilled me through and through so that the minutes passed unheeded, until the sound of wheels upon the drive caused the lodgekeeper to gaze inquisitively out of the window to see who it was that might come to call upon his lady in her absence.

While he was gone Alec whispered to me.

“ Arthur, George is displeased with you.”

“ With me, Mister Pond? ” I answered, in some alarm.

“ Who else, my boy, who else? ” he returned.

“ I have done nothing, Mister Pond,” I declared in grief and astonishment.

“ My boy,” he answered, solemnly and impressively, “ when the pit and the gallery pay your keep and travelling expenses you must humour the pit and the gallery or — ” and he spread his hands apart to give point to his discourse, “ down with the curtain and depart.”

“ But how have I offended him? ” I demanded. “ I wanted to hear you, for I’m not interested in all these family histories; but I listened to him as well as I could.”

“ Only with one ear, my noble prince, only with one ear. Better to use them both, my son, even though it be against the grain, when the pocket is empty and the cupboard bare.”

“ But my pocket isn’t empty,” I protested.

“ But mine is! ” he cried.

Then it was I understood, and humbly apologising and promising to do better on the lodge-keeper’s return, I pondered within myself over my first lesson in dissimulation, and seeing George Pond approaching the window where we were standing, I pointed to a portrait of a loose lipped, petulant looking boy of about ten holding a blood-

hound on a leash, and said, with as much interest as I could assume, "I was waiting for you, Mister Pond, to tell me who this boy is."

Alec would have thrown his arms about me had he dared, but his brother — though pleased — showed disapproval, at the manner of my question.

"That young gentleman, my boy," he answered, pompously, with the accent on the "young gentleman," "is Sir Edward Lorrilow, the present baronet, the only son of 'er ladyship and the late baronet, painted by Sir James Lorrilow the late baronet, when the present baronet was eleven years old; and as big a little scamp as ever walked, and I don't care who hears me say so, though it mustn't go back to her ladyship's ears, not as it's ever likely to, seeing as 'er ladyship won't have much to say to the likes of you, young man. Sir Edward is now living at Vennis, in Italy, where he has resided for the past sixteen years, and I hope it will be another sixteen years before he comes back, for though he is legal owner of all these vast estates, as well as the house in Grosvenor Square and two hundred acres in North West London, and half of the county of Nottingham, I pity him if he tries to lay his hand on a foot of it as long as 'er ladyship is alive. For though his father, the late baronet, doted on him, his mother, 'er present ladyship, for some reason

or other hates the very sound of his name, and there isn't a tenant or servant that dares mention it in her hearing, or out he would go without a moment's warning; though sometimes 'er ladyship 'as been known to sit and grieve for hours, but only I believe because he's the last of his line and she never feels certain as to who might succeed to the title through him." Then sweeping his hand toward the picture in pompous peroration, he cried, "Sir Edward Lorrilow, the present baronet, painted by Sir James Lorrilow the late baronet, when Sir Edward the present baronet, and the last of his line, was eleven years old."

Alec's touch on my shoulder was never so loving as now.

"Arthur, my prince," he murmured, "how gloriously that flesh glows with the bloom of youth! Even as yours does. And the expression of the eyes shows a painter filled with the fire of paternal love. Look at those shapely little hands, with the little finger slightly cocked! See? Just a slight uplifting. How they speak of the blood of a hundred noble sires! That is not paint, my boy, but living flesh and blood laid with a loving hand on worthless canvas — an art, transcendant."

I sighed when he had finished and my cheeks burned with a glow of pleasure at his words.

Meanwhile his brother was all impatience to

relate the virtues of a noble dame clad in a steel blue dress, one of the largest canvases in the collection, so we followed meekly to stand in reverential awe before it.

“Her present ladyship,” he announced in full round tones, noting our interested demeanour with obvious satisfaction, “the relict of the late baronet and mother of the present one, third daughter of the Duke of Galloway in Scotland, who brought with her as her dowry —”

The opening of the door at the farther end of the room and a rustle of draperies interrupted his flow, and we turned to behold the original of the painting, her brows raised in high bred surprise, advancing towards the table.

Never have I seen so rapid a change in any man’s demeanour! The pompous, arrogant, domineering and purseproud brother and patron was replaced by a cringing, fawning sycophant of a thing, so poor and mean and humble that my cheeks blazed for very shame of him. And Alec too, was all of a tremor, with startled eyes and fumbling hands, as nervous and self conscious as a naughty boy discovered in mischief. With raised lorgnette her ladyship gazed upon us.

“Visitors, Pond?” she queried.

“I took the liberty, your ladyship,” he answered, with confusion, “in your ladyship’s absence, not knowing your ladyship had returned,

of inviting my brother and his young companion to view your ladyship's collection, hoping that your ladyship will excuse the liberty."

"Indeed! Is this your brother?"

She looked at Alec as though he were one of the pictures.

Alec who by now had recovered his composure, swept the ground with his hat in a bow worthy of D'Artagnan.

"Most gracious lady," he said, with hand on heart, "it is indeed an honour that a lady so fair and proud as you should notice an actor so poor as I."

She stiffened a little at this.

"Did I hear your brother say he was an actor, Pond?" she demanded.

"A humble votary I at the shrine of Thespis," answered Alec, not giving the lodgekeeper a chance to speak for him, "to whom that fickle deity has been none too kind. But poor as I am in raiment, I am rich indeed in the practice of the art I love. With the great Irving, I —"

But she interrupted him with that brusque rudeness which the cultured and high bred often use toward the poor.

"And who is this young person, pray?"

She looked at me at first with the same cool, insolent, critical stare with which she had favoured Alec, starting at my boots and scanning my clothes,

not missing a single button, until mounting upward her eyes met mine. I knew not what she saw there, but her mouth opened slightly and a deathly pallor swept over her, and stretching out her arm in the manner of a queen of melodrama she pointed an accusing finger at my poor self, while her breath came thick and fast and her voice was the voice of one who choked.

“Who are you, boy?” she demanded, hoarsely.

“I am Jim Sturgess of the Goat and Compasses, my lady,” I answered, with much respect.

She gazed a moment longer and her pent up emotion found vent at last.

“Begone!” she commanded, fiercely, stamping her foot the while. “Begone, this instant! And see you, Pond, that he never enters this house again.”

With pale face and darkling eye the lodge-keeper hurried me unceremoniously to the door by which we had entered. My faithful Alec hastened after us and ere his brother had time to slam the door, he slipped through with me and so together we trudged again homewards, through the woods, across the meadows and down the leafy lanes, with never a word until my paternal door was reached. There we paused a moment, and as he gripped my hand in his he shook his poor old head until his curls wagged like curtains in a breeze.

“ My prince, this has been a sad, sad day for both of us,” Alec declared, in a voice choked with tears.

## CHAPTER IV

### A BARRELLOGUE

I SAID not a word about this adventure, for I had learned the wisdom of caution in regard to strange happenings since the episode of Bill Blay and "what's writ is writ," but I pondered over it the more.

Father had not improved with years. He was larger and redder than formerly, and drank so much that he was sullen and morose most of the time.

Mother had grown thinner and more acid as to tongue, and whatever spark of love had ever existed between these two was now but a mass of embers fast smouldering into hate.

I had always been a source of irritation to Father, and in his cups he would eye me with an amount of suspicion the cause of which was impossible for me to guess. But for the watchful care of Mother who never left my side when he was intoxicated, I believe he would have done me serious injury, but so afraid was he of her venomous tongue that he would go about his work in sullen ill humour, his only vent consisting in

tearing strips of paper from the edge of the *Morning Advertiser* which he would roll into little pellets and chew with an evil relish. Mother honestly tried to do her duty by me as far as she understood the word, but it was obviously a duty and not a pleasure. To her I was merely the future energy that in the course of nature would carry on the business that kept her in material comforts. So she encouraged me to work and forbade me to dream.

The night of my adventure I ran down the cellar steps glad at heart because I was still my own master, it being, as I have said, my half day off, and as there was no immediate hurry about the evening beer I closed the door, and sitting on the bottom step gazed into the cellar's obscurity. Slowly my eyes grew accustomed to its gloom and out of its lurking shadows, one by one, the barrels showed forth shadowy outlines. There is something about a barrel that always strikes an answering chord within me, something so companionable, so cheery withall, such an air of good fellowship in its corpulent rotundity, as if it were not for the restraining iron bands it would fly asunder in its very eagerness to let out the good things contained within its depths.

So one by one they appeared from the murk all along the low wall like jolly friars on bended knees, with heads bowed down in deepest rever-

ence;—only it looked as if some one had come through and chopped off their heads, and their fat and stooping bodies remained chuckling at the absurdity of it all, and, where their gullets had once been, were inserted long and sinuous jointed pipes, which gathered in a bunch above my head and there spread out, each to follow its appointed path to the beer engines in the bar above. The ray of sunlight coming through the bars of the ventilator high up under the ceiling brought into strong relief the two white letters on the nearest cask, and up its fairy path danced little silver specks and a moth fluttered in it like a dancer in the limelight. The majestic bulk of the large up-standing sixty gallon spirit casks loomed up through the shadowy palings which divided the beer from the spirit cellar, and the little firkins that held the stout and porter snugly tucked away between the barrels along the other wall, gave promise of a joviality equal to their big brothers' when they had grown to full maturity.

A subdued murmuring came from overhead, with shuffling of feet over sanded floors, the occasional slamming of doors, and muffled jolts as the "pulls" of the engines sprang back after each delivery of sparkling, frothing beer.

I sat in the semi-darkness as I often did when things had gone awry, and asked myself time and time again what could be the answer to the riddles

of the day. Why had I been turned out of the picture gallery so abruptly, as if I were a pestilent thing, and forbidden ever to see it again? Why had her ladyship's face blanched at sight of me? What had happened to the lodgekeeper after my departure? And how was it going to fare with poor Alec's empty pocket and bare cupboard now that I had so unwittingly upset his calculations? And the ragged wanderer in the woods — who was he to take such vivid interest in me? What did he want of my mother?

The splash of the waste coming through the pipe from the beer sink into the tub beside me aroused me, and finding no answer to the questions that disturbed me I rose from my seat and lit the gas. Crossing to the nearest barrel I tapped it with my knuckles. A hollow sound like a mocking laugh issued from its bulging sides as if it held the answer but was too knowing a thing of the world to divulge its secret. The next I tapped with like result; but there was no need to test the third, as the hissing froth around the bung told me that the "finings" were at work and the contents fit to slake the thirst of the sturdy yeomen above my head. So with a few sharp strokes of the mallet I drove the tap well home and affixing the pipes notified my father, by knocking on the ceiling. Then "fining" another barrel ready for future use I climbed upon it and, sitting astride

its sturdy back with my hands in my pockets and my back against the whitewashed wall, gave myself up to reveries.

I must have fallen asleep, for very soon I found my barrel floating on a turbid sea, waves dashing at me on all sides mountains high while all around an impenetrable mist shut out the course. Soon, to my horror, I found myself attacked by a shark, which lifting up its head, grinned at me with flashing teeth from out a black unshaven chin, while snaky locks, wild and uncontrolled, obscured the baleful glare in its black and beady eyes. Suddenly it had caught the barrel and sprang up beside me! We swayed to and fro in deadly combat.

The terror of the nightmare was so dreadful that I cried to the only soul I loved.

“Alec!” I wailed. “Oh, Alec!”

“Jim!” A voice called, imperiously. “Jim, where are you?”

“Here!” I answered, startled into wakefulness, and scrambling hastily from off my perch, “down in the cellar.”

“What the devil are you doing down there, wasting the gas?” came the voice of my father down the stairs. “Don’t you know it’s closing time?”

Startled into sweating apprehension at finding I had slumbered on the barrel all the evening I

divested myself of my apron and ran upstairs to the bar. Father was calling the time-honoured formula: "Now then, gents, closing time please!"

I saw the saloon and private bar customers out with many a cheery good night, then locking the doors prepared to marshal out those of the public bar and tap-room. Slowly they trooped past me, a motley crew — old Bill, Darkey Bill and Gipsy Bill, Fred Oldcorn, the carter, "Charlie," the night watchman, and his buxom wife, the withered, road mender of uncountable years and unbelievable adventures; and every one had a kindly word for Jim the potboy.

Lowering the outside lamp I was about to lock the door when I noticed a man in the far corner of the tap-room, fast asleep at the table with his head in his arms, so crossing the bar I shook him roughly.

"Now then, wake up, you can't stop here all night," I cried.

Father was clearing the takings out of the till ready for the nightly audit, so did not notice my start and exclamation as the surprised and withal triumphant face of the mongrel Italian tramp who had attacked me in the woods gazed into mine. He shuffled past me in his filthy rags, and stopping at the door chuckled fiendishly through set teeth with his face unpleasantly near

my own. Phew! I can smell the garlic now, filtering through the fumes of alcohol!

“ Ha ha! my cock! de saints haf led me to de ver ’ouse,— and is your moder keeping ver well? ”

I answered him never a word, but sick at heart I slammed the door and locked his jeering laughter out with the stars.

## CHAPTER V

### MY MOTHER'S ILL HEALTH

THE next morning the first person to enter the house was no other than the man who had left it last the night before! No word of greeting passed between us, but with sardonic malevolence he grinned at me and, going boldly to the counter, demanded a mixed Vermouth which Father served. Seating himself at the table he untied a red handkerchief, and taking therefrom some cheese, bread and a large malodorous onion, he drew that same murderous knife I had so much reason to remember and breakfasted silently and alone.

Mother came down at half past seven and busied herself over breakfast, for being such a small family we had no need of a maid; neither was our business so flourishing that we could afford help in the bar, so it was always Mother's custom to relieve Father for three hours in the afternoon and one in the evening, and sometimes take duty of a morning when his head was muzzy from his overnight potations.

I swept up and sanded the floors of the pri-

vate and public bars, avoiding the tap-room as a plague. The early morning sunlight streamed in through the open doors. The grateful scent and sound of sizzling sausages whetted my youthful appetite. And presently it befel that I spied Mother at the bottom of the stairs preparing to carry up the tray, and jumping at any opportunity to delay my operations in that fateful tap-room, I hastened down that I might carry it for her, an attention that was gratefully if not graciously accepted.

So behold us in the bar-parlour, which was at once our breakfast and dining room, mother and son, bustling about the preparations for the meal, which, being completed, Mother went to the glass door and tapped thereon that Father might know we awaited the pleasure of his company.

Pulling aside the red curtain that covered the lower half of the glass panels she surveyed the morning's customers, and from my coign of vantage at her elbow I saw the eyes of the foreign tramp lift and meet her own. A bland smile of recognition in which there was much of cruel triumph lighted up his vulpine face, as, half rising from his seat, he doffed his dirty hat with an exuberant flourish and bowed with mock punctilio to the floor.

Mother dropped the curtain as if it burnt her and staggering back into the room, her face as

white as her own tablecloth, collapsed into the nearest chair.

Father coming in at the same moment, she rose and poured out his tea with trembling hands.

“Matilda,” Father said, ungraciously, “what’s the matter with you?”

“I don’t know,” she replied, all of a flutter. “Oh! I don’t know; I—I’ve got a bit of a headache, I think.”

“Think,” he almost snarled, “don’t you know?”

She gave him such a look that he changed his tone.

“Why,” he said with more consideration, “you were all right this morning, weren’t you?”

“Was I?” she snapped, “was I? How do you know I was all right? You never troubled to inquire.”

“Well,” he persisted, anxious to conciliate, “you were all right when you went to bed last night anyway.”

“For all the trouble you ever take to find out I might be half dead and you never know it,” she answered, wiping her moist eyes with her handkerchief.

Seeing all the signs of a coming storm I stepped into the field, like the blundering fool I was.

“Anyway, Mother,” I piped with conviction,

"you were well enough when you brought the breakfast up, weren't you?"

She stiffened and sat up as straight as a wooden soldier and glared at me with flashing eyes.

"Jim!" she gasped. "James! how dare you! How dare you, I say? You wicked boy, how dare you suggest that I am not telling the truth?"

Leaving her breakfast untasted, she flounced out of the room and presently we heard the rattle of the key in her bedroom door above.

Father sat with puckered brows, his cheeks puffed out and wet protruding lip, then getting up as if with sudden resolution strode heavily into the bar. In a minute he was back again, and taking his stand at the side of the table opposite to me, he bent his heavy face to mine.

"What's upset her?" he asked, with such suddenness that I nearly choked myself with sausage ere I could reply.

"I don't know."

"I believe you're a young liar," he snarled.

"Believe what you like, Father," I retorted hotly. "I know no more than you do."

"Who's that out there?" he demanded, pointing a dramatic finger to the bar door.

"How should I know? I never saw him till yesterday," I answered, with perfect truth.

"You damned liar!" he stormed, thumping the table with his fist. "If you'd never seen him be-

fore why did he speak to you as he went out last night? If you'd never seen him before why have you avoided him all the morning? Why haven't you done out the tap-room this morning as you always do first, you snivelling, artful little devil, you!" and he came round the table with fist clenched threateningly, as if by his very violence he would knock the truth out of me.

But I shrunk from him never an inch. Boldly I stood upright with head thrown back, giving him look for look and scorn for scorn.

"Oh! how can you?" I cried wildly. "Is it not enough that you have crushed me always in the dirt, deprived me of everything that I should look upon as mine by right, taken all the joy out of my life, stifled all my hopes and blasted all my longings in order that you might save a potboy's wages, but that now you must brand me as a liar? I am *not* a liar! I am *not* a liar! And you know I'm not a liar. I won't stand that from any one!"

After which I broke down completely and blubbered like the child I was, while he stood by regarding me with frightened eyes.

"What did you try to keep out of his way for?" he demanded in more reasonable tones.

"Because I'm afraid of him," I answered, wiping my eyes.

"Then you have met him before?" he queried, quickly.

"Not before yesterday as I told you," I replied, equally quick to perceive the trap he laid for me. "He attacked me yesterday afternoon, with a knife, in Ravenhurst woods."

His jaw dropped in genuine surprise.

"Attacked you? What for?"

"Because I fell over him."

"What do you mean?"

"I was running after a hare and he was lying asleep in the bracken, so I fell right over him and he went for me with a knife — and he'd a stabbed me, too, if old Alec hadn't come up and driven him off."

Then a strange thing happened, the like of which I had never experienced before. My father came over to me and patted my shoulder, and by the way he did it I could feel he was ashamed.

"Jim," he said, quite kindly, "you're not such a bad sort, Jim. You run and clean that tap-room. I'll keep an eye on him. But finish your breakfast first."

So when I had quite recovered my composure out into the lion's den went Daniel, and the watchful eye of Father kept the savage beast at bay.

All that day Mother kept her room, while Father and I picnicked on sandwiches and banbury cakes, and when I went up and offered to make her some beef tea, she would have none of it

but looked so pale and hollow-eyed and stricken withal that I would have tried to kiss some comfort into her had she but given me the slightest encouragement. All she did was to grip me passionately by the hands.

“Jimmy,” she begged, hoarsely, “don’t you ever speak to that man in the bar or let your father know I mentioned him.”

## CHAPTER VI

### SATAN BARGAINS WITH BEELZEBUB

THE next day was like its predecessor. Mother kept to her room, looking very ill and taking little nourishment; Father was none too sweet from the bad night he'd had and the foreign tramp, who was again our first visitor and remained with us, till closing time, talked continuously with Father throughout the morning, and interfered with nobody. The day after he was not so early. Therefore Mother ventured down to breakfast, retiring again to her room the moment our daily visitor arrived, this time in all the glory of a new ready made suit, and Father's eyes as he watched her departure were half shut and so full of meaning, that I was relieved when, during his absence in the afternoon, the distillers came and I, as was my custom, went down into the spirit cellar to superintend the filling of the casks.

In the corner of the tap-room, under the table, there was a round hole in the floor, usually plugged with a great wooden bung which, on distiller's days, was removed so that the men by dropping a pipe down could more easily fill the great casks

than by carrying the heavy puncheons down the stairs; and it was my duty to climb the steps and insert the end of the pipe into the top of the cask destined to contain whatever spirit they might have brought.

I had heard Bill Blay's shuffling step come in soon after I had gone down and was still on the top of the ladder, replacing the bung in the rum cask, when the sound of squeaky boots across the floor came to my ears through the hole above, and the voice of old Bill raised in much surprise.

“Why, Beppo!” he exclaimed. “Well, I never! How long have you been back?”

“Is it William?” demanded the voice of the Italian. “Holy smoke, I thought you was dead.”

Hearty laughter broke from that doddering old lump of senility at this retort, and though I could not see him yet I could picture him wiping his rheumy eyes.

“Dead! That’s a good un. Dead! Oh lor! you won’t beat that.”

While he was thus speaking squeaky boots went over to the bar, halted a bit, then went back again, and I heard the pots ground on the table just over my head.

“You see, William? Look! I suppose you still drink beer!” said Beppo invitingly.

“Wot, me?” replied Bill, his mirth checked for a moment. “Still drink beer? Oh lor! Me

still drink beer? If that don't cap the t'other one. I shan't drink beer when I'm dead. You may bet on that, Beppo," he concluded with sudden brilliance.

After a while Beppo's voice sounded in subdued enquiry.

" You gettin' along alright, hey? "

" Pretty fair, Beppo, pretty fair, though there ain't much an old coachman can do nowadays, what with all them motors and things about."

" What you do for a living, hey? "

" Nothin'. 'Ow can I do anythin' with me 'ands like this 'ere, all crooked up with roomatiz? Why I can't 'old the reins with them 'ands, an' my feet — w'y — you saw the way I come in didn't yer? "

" You was 'ere when I come."

" Ah! so I was! Look at that! There's a foot for yer, and t'other one ain't no better. W'y I ain't been able to do nothin' 'ardly for the last ten year or more."

" Ha! that was ver' bad. Say? 'Ow you live den, hey? "

" W'y as ter that — Wot, 'ave yer brought the young guvnor 'ome arter all? "

" No — 'e stay dere. Chioggia. 'E go to Hell for me. I come away. I want to see my ole pal."

" Wot? 'E ain't come back then? "

“No.”

“You ain’t left ’is service, ’ave yer? Fallen out with him like arter all these years?”

“P’st! ’E is a swine. I dress ’im and shave ’im and keep ’im out of trouble for nineteen year, and den one day ’e kick me — like dat —’ere — and den — ha! I stick ’im good — like dat. But ’ow you live, hey?”

“Stick ’im, did yer? Did yer ’urt ’im?”

“No, it was only cut — in de neck —’ere.”

“I s’pose you run for it then, didn’t yer? I say I s’pose you cleared off then?”

“I ’ave been to sea for two year — steward — dog’s life — den I go America an’ work all over de shop, den I come back for see ole pals.”

“Been up to the ’ouse?”

“You go dere?”

“I said ’ave *you* been up. Seen the old girl?”

“’Er ladyship, she still live dere, hey?”

“Wearin’ well, ain’t she? ’Aughty as ever, ain’t she?”

“Ha!”

“Wot did she say w’en she see you?”

“She surprise of course. She ask me about Sir Edward. She say she see you often, too.”

“See me often?”

“Yes, she say you come for your pension reg’lar.”

I believe this was a shot in the dark, but whether

it was or not it served to make old Blay very wary, for in spite of a good deal of fishing he ventured on nothing more incriminating than a grunt.

“Say, William,” Beppo enquired, with great cordiality, “you ‘ave ‘nother one, old cock, hey?”

“Ah, I don’t mind, seein’ it’s you.”

Again the squeaky boots went to and fro and again the pots grounded on the table above.

“What about Matilda? Hey?” came Beppo’s cajoling purr.

“Well, wot about ‘er?” parried Bill Blay.

“She still alive, hey?”

“Wot, ain’t yer seen ‘er?”

“I seen ‘er, yes, but I ‘ave not spik.”

“Wearin’ well, ain’t she?”

A pause.

“William.”

“Yes.”

“‘Ave anoder drink.”

“Flush, ain’t yer?” croaked old Bill.

“I ‘ave save a bit — I please to see you, my ole cock.”

“Well — thank yer — just one more.”

Another journey of squeaky boots.

“Well — William — ‘ere’s to us and ‘er — an’ may ‘e never know.”

“Who?”

“Ole Sturgess.”

“Not if I can ‘elp it. ‘Ere’s luck!”

“ Not if dey can 'elp it, you mean.”

“ Who's they? ”

“ Matilda and 'er Ladyship — hey? ”

There was a sound like a slap. I believe it was Beppo's hand on old Bill's back, followed by uproarious laughter.

“ William, s'pose I tell 'im? ”

“ No, no, no! you mustn't do that — It wouldn't be fair to Jim.”

“ It would not be fair to — you! Hey? Haha! ”

Then of a sudden Beppo's good humour changed to a threatening snarl.

“ Look 'ere, my ole cock,” he said, hoarsely, “ you give me arf dat. See? ”

“ Arf o' wot? ”

“ Arf of wot you're bleedin' dose two women for, or I'll tell ole Sturgess an' Jim too.”

“ I ain't gettin' nothin' out of them.”

“ Don't you go play no Goddam innocent stunts on me, or I spoil your game damn quick. See? ”

Bill blustered in impotent fury at this and said something about giving him in charge, whereat Beppo's mirth broke out anew, although it was subdued.

“ Now, my friend, where you live, hey? ”

“ Find out.”

“ Dat is what I am goin' to do. I am goin' to stop right 'ere until you go an' then I will follow

you 'ome. I am tired of sleepin' in de woods. You'd like a lodger, hey?"

"I'll see you damned first."

"Alright, just as you please," and squeaky boots got up and went to the bar.

"Mistaire Sturgess."

"Hullo!" answered Father's voice.

There was a great scuffling as Bill Blay scrambled up and went after the Italian and there followed an agitated whispering in a tone so low I caught no word of it.

"Yes, what is it?" came Father's voice, waxing impatient.

"I was wondering, Mistaire Sturgess, if you could tell me of anywhere where I could find a good lodging."

Before Father could answer old Bill Blay, in a quavery voice which he strove manfully to control, took up the tale.

"W'y as to that, I've got a very nice little cottage where I'd be right glad to 'ave some one to keep me company," said he.

"Dat is ver' kind of you," answered the Italian, and I could imagine the gleaming of his teeth. "We are already such friends nothing would suit me better. I will 'ave a drink wid you on dat an' den we will go round in time for tea, hey?"

So, calling for a mixed Vermouth which Bill

paid for, they drank in silence and departed; whereat I climbed down from my perch, and going up-stairs replaced the wooden bung within the floor.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE STORM GATHERS AND BREAKS

THE afternoon was oppressive and overcast, and I doubly felt the burden of the crates as I tramped mile after mile through the village and surrounding district, delivering bottles of beer.

There was a stillness in the air, in the grass by the wayside, in the leaves of the trees and bushes, everywhere but in my heart. In my heart there was a raging tornado, a veritable maelstrom of conflicting doubts which so engrossed me that many a time I caught myself trudging blindly on, half a mile out of my way.

Was ever a lad so sore perplexed as I? What secret was it these two plotters held between them? How had the reprobate old coachman been bleeding my mother and Lady Lorrilow? And did bleeding mean extorting money from them? Why that was what men called blackmail, a horrible crime punished by years and years of imprisonment, if not by life itself. I stopped still in my tracks and, putting down my basket, stared angrily at the western sky. The blackguards! The scoundrels! How dare they? And raising

my puny fists to heaven I swore to have it out with them, and force my mother to tell me all ere yet another day was born.

The sky was becoming as black as night now and great banks of darkling cloud obscured the setting sun. Fitful gusts of wind hurried me home, and fallen leaves, wild and excited, raced me on the way, falling over each other in their panic until lukewarm drops of rain caught them and toppled them over one by one to lay, panting and exhausted, on their brown and golden sides.

Father was savagely drunk when I returned and bullied me roundly for dawdling, and when I went up-stairs to Mother she railed at me so when I mentioned Beppo's name, and looked so wild and distraught that I postponed my investigation till a more propitious time.

All that evening the storm raged with uncontrolled ferocity, the wind blustering, shrieking and moaning round the house, blowing in great gusts of rain every time the door opened to admit a soaking customer; every little while vivid veins of liquid light blazed athwart the sky followed by deafening booms, which trailed into growls and cracklings as the thunder claps subsided.

Spurred on by his savage humour I helped Father that night as I never had before, and was glad indeed when I heard the hour of closing ring out from the clock of the parish church.

Bustling about I saw the last unwilling wayfarer upon his way, and was putting out the lamp at the door when Beppo sprang suddenly from the darkness and thrusting a letter into my hand, whispered, "for your moder," and vanished again.

Startled and surprised at his advent I held it in my hand, and had hardly bolted the door inside when Father snatched it from me and with one blow of his cowardly fist beat me senseless to the floor.

• • • • •

I opened my eyes and stared about me. I was uncommonly cold, and my bed seemed unusually hard. Also, I was aware in a dim way that some one, I knew not who, had a splitting headache. I remember that I felt sorry for him and wondered who it was. Then sighing deeply I sank back into the void. . . . Again I was shocked to discover that I had been awake for some time. I wondered what caused the door to rattle and what were those sounds of heavy conflict. Of a sudden I raised myself onto my elbow, wide awake now, and ears alert to catch a repetition of the sound that had alarmed me, a sound so like a shriek of mortal anguish that it penetrated to the very core of my being and sent a thrill of horror to my finger tips.

As I thus reclined memory reasserted itself with

a flash. I knew that my bed was hard because it was the floor of the bar on which I had fallen. I knew that I felt cold because of the wind that whistled in savage fury through the space below the door. I knew that the head that ached was my own. And because of these things I was filled with a great resentment towards my brutal father and a fear of him beyond my understanding.

A vivid flash of lightning lit up every corner of the bar. So vivid and intense was it that I caught in its momentary glare the names on the little, earthen port and sherry barrels on the shelf behind the bar, and it gave me a start of surprise to see the glint of the money still uncounted in the till. The booming artillery of God followed so rapidly that the air was still aglare with the after-glow of the lightning, and even above the awful cataclysm I plainly heard the rip and thud as the giant trees beyond the house came crashing to the earth. A sound as of moaning filled the air outside and in, and so persistent was it that I was moved to fancy that some one lay grievously hurt on our doorstep and unlocked the door to see. The fury of the wind and rain swept me back into the bar, and before I could bolt the door another sound within the house arrested me, the sound of running water, so, going noiselessly to the door leading from the bars to the house, I peered cautiously into the gloom.

The lavatory door was open and the gas lit. I saw my father in his shirtsleeves, washing his hands in the water that flowed from the tap. Such a sensation of mortal dread came over me at sight of him that I dared not pass him to go to bed. So like a frightened rabbit I slipped down the cellar steps and scrambled to the farthest corner of the spirit cellar.

In a little while I caught the sound of my father's footsteps shuffling carefully along the passage to the bar. I heard him move, with an eternity of time between each step. I heard him stop as if perplexed. Then there came dull and muffled sounds as if he groped around under forms and tables. I knew with instinctive terror he was searching for me.

A sudden furious gust blew open the door I had forgotten to lock. He staggered back to the table, where he remained, for hours it seemed to me, then went cautiously to the door muttering to himself. After a bit I heard him shut it to and, with normal step, busy himself about the bar. I heard the chink of money and then his hurried footsteps go over to the door again, which closed with a bang, and all was still.

The deathly silence that followed so unnerved me that I shivered as with an ague, but gradually I found myself nodding with a great weariness, awaking with a start and heart aflutter at every

slightest sound till, in the fulness of time, it came to pass that my head bowed to my breast and I fell into a deep and dreamless sleep.

A repeated drumming and singing in a high pitched voice slowly forced itself into my understanding. A bright shaft of sunlight was beating down through the ventilator, and I realised with a start that it was day and the Lord only knew what time it was.

I felt much better now, and the fear of my father had vanished. The memories of the day before came to me in a flood. I was ready to face him now and, come what might, I was resolved to leave his roof and seek my fortune in the great world beyond.

So I hurried up into the bar, and there was Bob Manners, the milkman, banging away on the counter while he roused the very echoes with his melodious yodeling, and the morning sun was streaming through the windows from a sky that was blue and cloudless.

“Well, Jim,” he greeted me, boisterously, “what’s come to you all this morning? Did you all get so drunk last night that you can’t come down before this? And the front door open into the bargain! Wot’s up? Did you have a wedding yesterday or a funeral?”

I glanced up at the clock and found to my horror it was half past eight!

"Nice morning, Bob, isn't it, after the storm?" I said, foolishly.

"Nice morning! I should say it was, and me standing here and knocking like I don't know what for the last twenty minutes. I might have helped myself to all the stuff on the shelves and pinched the till into the bargain, only there ain't anything in it. Give us a mild and bitter, Jim, and find out how much milk you want. And hurry up, there's a good chap."

I drew the beer, still grinning shamefacedly, and opened the door to the bar-parlour.

"Mother!" I called, "how much milk this morning? Mother! Here's Bob Manners! How much milk do you want?"

Getting no answer I entered the house and ran quickly up-stairs to my parents' bedroom. I was still too muddled and confused with the night's adventures to wonder that neither one of them was up and about as usual. I was, also, ashamed to be caught so dirty and dishevelled, so that in my anxiety to be rid of Bob I knocked on the door and called again. And presently, getting no answer, I opened the door and looked into the room.

The sight that met my eyes I will carry with me to my dying day. The bedroom was in the wildest disorder, the bedclothes disarranged and torn, a chair turned on its side, the mirror smashed, the crocks from off the washstand shiv-

ered in a thousand pieces on the floor, the walls bespattered and carpet drenched in foul and awful stains, and the woman to whom I had yearned so long for love lying across the fireplace, partly dressed, with arms outstretched, eyes fixed and staring in piteous appeal, slashed and stabbed with many a gaping wound and stained with dried and darkling blood!

With wailing cries of horror, I rushed out that shambles down the stairs into the bar, and throwing myself into the astonished arms of Bob Manners, sobbed out my soul's deep agony.

“Oh, Bob, it's awful! Awful!”

I broke down completely under the weight of my misfortunes, and cried and cried and cried, as I had never cried before.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE CORONER'S VERDICT

OF what followed on that fateful day I can tell you nothing with distinctness. All that I can now recall with any clearness being the look of chagrin on the face of Bob Manners when, in my unseeing panic, I kicked over his can of milk. Neighbours came in and out, and policemen guarded the locked doors and interrogated every one. One of them sealed the bedroom door until the coroner was brought, and all was bustle and stir and excitement, and Father was nowhere to be found, so I slept the night at the sergeant's house.

The inquest came in due time and if you desire a good and full description thereof take any Sunday paper and read any one of those ghoulish tales especially dished up for Sabbath consumption. It was the same old sordid tale, with one man's evidence pointing this way and another's that; the twelve good men and true, being led first in one direction and then in the other, and the grave and learned coroner, like the good sheep dog he was, bringing them at last into one sure fold of a true and faithful verdict.

Father's disappearance concerned me not a whit, and though I firmly believed that he was the author of our woe, yet I was careful to make no comment on that awful night beyond mentioning that he had struck me, and that I had lain where I had fallen for hours before creeping down to the cellar to sleep. For was he not my father?

I can see myself now facing the coroner, standing at the table in the public bar with hands clasped behind my back, answering every question put to me truthfully, according to my oath, but as tersely as I could for very fear that my unbridled lips should let slip one word whereby the guilt of murder could be fastened on my father's soul.

I mentioned not a word of the conversation I had overheard; but I told of the letter, the meeting in the woods and Beppo's daily visits. As to Father not being home when Bob Manners' drumming brought me startled from my hiding place, that was a frequent occurrence, for many a time did he creep out o' nights when honest folk were asleep and slink in with the morning dews, laden down with game. But his continued disappearance was the cause of sore suspicion to those yeomen jurors and the coroner. Search was made high and low through all the countryside; stations were watched, and every constable in the county exerted himself with unceasing vigour. Scotland

Yard came down and drank our waters, and it was then that another discovery was made.

Beppo had gone, too, leaving only one trace and that was his knife, that same coarse, villainous weapon he had brandished in my face on my last holiday. Blay found it near the stream, all caked with mud and other stains, in a bracken covered burrow by the bridge. All around there were signs of strife and struggling, with trampled mud and bruised and broken grass, and near it was a hat and coat — and the hat and coat belonged to my father!

So at the next inquiry behold Billy Blay, garrulous and truculent, spitting out his spite against his lodger, telling how he came and forced acquaintance, how he talked of dark and bloody doings in the past, how he was a pauper and a vagrant and a pestilent disturber of our rustic peace. So much did he say and so fast did he say it and there was such a light of joy in his eyes, that the coroner was fain to pull him up, and tell him in his sternest tones to keep to the point of the enquiry. I gazed at him wide eyed and mouth agape, but never a hint did he give of the battle of wits in the bar, or of that dark secret that Beppo was so keen to share, and I was glad that I had held my tongue for suspicion is but suspicion after all.

And so it came to pass that in the fulness of

time he who was called the foreman, arose, and coughing in his embarrassment at being thus conspicuous, blushed like a raspberry and delivered himself in this wise :

“ Doctor Smart, ahem, I mean, Sir — er — Mister Crowner, we’m all of us carefully considered wot the witnesses ’ave said wot ’ave been called before us in this ’ere matter,— a touching on this ’ere ’orrible tragedy, ahem, I should say in this ’ere case, sir — er — Mister Crowner, and with great respect, sir, and we’ve come to the conclusion — er — to the conclusion that arter doo consideration and, if I may say it, Sir, er — Mister Crowner, takin’ into consideration them bootiful words wot so lately fell from your lips, Doctor — er — Mister Smart — er — ahem, Crowner, that the departed lady met ’er end, sir, by the ’and o’ some person or other and we’m danged if we quite know who it is, sir, and there y’are.”

“ But I can hardly be expected to accept that as a verdict,” remonstrated the coroner, mildly. “ Do you mean that you are all agreed that the deceased was wilfully murdered? ”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ Wilfully murdered by some person? ”

“ Yes, sir. By either Mister Sturgess or the Hytalian.”

“ But that there is not sufficient evidence as to whom? ” went on the coroner, calmly.

"Yes, sir," replied the foreman, "that's just what I said."

"Then," said the coroner, "with that verdict I am entirely in accord," and bowing formally to the jury he dismissed the court.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE MOMENTOUS BICYCLE

LONG ere the events just recorded had come to pass all that remained of my poor mother was laid to rest, and with her, as far as I knew, the secret that had soured her life. That dreary day with all its sable pomp and muffled heartache, and the ones preceding it, were dismal days for me beyond belief; so that my heart bounded with great joy on receipt of the following letter in almost unintelligible caligraphy, the spirit of which reached my hungry soul before my eyes had mastered half its sentences.

103 Mall Road,  
London,  
July, 18—.

My poor dear boy:

I have heard of the base and scurvy fate which has overtaken you. Why is it that my prince so young and fresh should be bowed down ere yet the bloom of youth has left his cheek? Treachery is afoot, treason base and bloody stalks naked and unashamed amid your sylvan solitudes. Grim crime and utter desolation hold high revelry about my prince's abode and he stands orphaned and

alone calling from out of the murk of blood for Hubert's protecting shadow.

My dear boy, here in my humble haunt there is a bed, a poor one but none so poor that you need scorn it, a chair, and a table which though it does not often groan, still holds enough that there is some to spare for you.

My Arthur, this mighty city is calling you from out your burrow. It holds rich gifts in both its hands for your acceptance. Come, and in the glowing radiance of its kindly sun let that great heavenly spark within your breast grow and expand, and finally shame the sun by its effulgence!

I cannot tell you how my heart bleeds for you, dear boy. Every day I think of you in your distress. Every night I weep for you. And though fate is so hard in her immutable decrees that she denies me the wherewithal to hasten to your side as my old heart dictates, still I am with you always in spirit and I know that my noble prince will not refuse the wish of Hubert to have his company.

Looking forward soon to the great and lasting joy of seeing you,

Believe me, my dear boy,

Always your sincere friend,

ALEXANDER HANNIBAL POND.

How I hugged that letter to my bosom, and how I kissed it! I locked myself within my small

room at the sergeant's house and laughed for joy, and, for the first time, burst into scalding tears over those friendly words of sympathy.

I had never known till then how many there were in this world who were concerned about my welfare. Uncles, aunts and cousins came to attend the last sad rites, many of whom I had never even heard of, and when we were all assembled round the table in the old bar-parlour numerous were the plans laid out for my acceptance. Uncle Bob, who was a jobbing printer in a small way in a midland city, offered to apprentice me for five years for nothing; Uncle Frank, who was a butcher, thought that an open air life carrying meat upon a wooden tray were much more healthy for me; and Uncle William, who was like father, was so engrossed in weighing up all the points in the problems before him that he uttered never a word, but when discussion was at its highest, finished up the port and fell asleep.

Then the brewers came to seize the house for debt, but the distillers got there first and there was a fine to-do. And one day Mister Bailey, Lady Lorrilow's agent, offered me a hundred pounds and my passage money if I would go to Canada, and was angry when I laughed at him. The sergeant, who was very kind to me through all my trouble, wrote to the insurance company about getting Mother's insurance for me, but as Father

was her next of kin and he was missing, they refused to pay anything.

The vicar, who was chairman of a local slate club of which Mother and I were members, imposed a shilling levy and as there were a hundred and forty members it realised seven pounds. To this sum he added five which he said was from a nameless friend. He, also, offered to get me work, but I told him a friend in London wished me to go there so that I might pursue my artistic studies. And good Bob Manners, who served most of our customers with milk, took upon himself a house to house collection and raised, by sheer hard wagging of his most persuasive tongue, four pounds, seven shillings and a halfpenny!

Fred Powell, the grocer's boy, hearing I was off to London offered me his bicycle for three pounds ten, and as it looked a good bicycle, being bright as to enamel and very radiant as to plated part, I became its owner; and when his work was done o' nights he taught me how to ride it.

And so it came to pass that I packed up my paints, a sketching block and a waterproof, and putting my toy pistol and two pounds in my pocket for pressing emergencies went to the post office, and sent Alec a letter accepting his kind offer and enclosing all my money to his care. I promised to be with him inside a week.

There was a little dispute with the postmistress

over the address, which she considered insufficient; but having shown her the letter and the West Strand postmark on the envelope, she added W. C. to the inscription, and gaily mounting my iron steed I rode out into the lists with fate.

BOOK II  
THE PRINCESS



## CHAPTER I

### MISADVENTURES

Hey for the dimpling downs!  
Ho for the glist'ning glade!  
Ha ha for the fields flung far  
And the earth that the good Lord made!

So sang my heart as down the glade I sailed or up the gentle rise I panted, drunk with the revelry of wild life; for wild was the wind that fanned my brow, wild was the verdure bordered road, and wild the ceaseless anthem of the wild things in the woods beyond. Hour after hour I sped thus until the pace and the fierceness of the summer sun began to tell on me, and coming to a little way-side shop, where there swung a battered sign that told of tea, I realised that I was hungry and thirsty, so getting down from my mount I opened the little gate and sat down on the time worn bench.

Having rested and refreshed myself and paid my score with a fine air of indifference befitting such a man of means as I, for it amounted in all to the large sum of tenpence, I got again upon my bike and pedalled eastward. While running down a small and easy hill where it was necessary

to put the brake on, I found to my fear and chagrin that the wheels went ever faster in spite of my precaution, so that I was obliged to back pedal for very life; and when, having thus regained control, I dismounted, I discovered that the rubber grips were gone, and my safety depended solely on my pedals. I sat down by the wayside to think the matter over.

I recalled that all that day I had flown along enchanted and such things as brakes had clean escaped my notice, moreover I had not need to bother overmuch, for my stomach being empty and my spirit all aflame I cared not what became of me. But now, I recalled again that during my lessons on this self same steed, Fred Powell had instructed me in the art of back pedalling, and had pointed out how unwise it was to pin one's faith in brakes when one's own sturdy legs were more to be depended on.

So being angry with myself that I had given away to fear, I placed the bike against the hedge and sat on the bank to rest, and as I sat and gazed around, the sun was setting in a flambent fury behind the stately spires of Fimbourne Abbey that topped the wooded heights.

So entranced was I by all its vivid splendour that taking out my little water pot, I filled it in the stream beside the bridge, and unstrapping my paints and sketching block from their place behind

the saddle, I scrambled up the bank and was soon lost to all things in my work.

I caught the fleeting salmon on the clouds, the opalescent glows that tinged the sky, the fire flaming on the trees, and the purple spires with the dying rays bringing out all their traceries. With fevered haste I laboured, singing for pure joy the while I worked, and having finished it I ran my knife around the block, freeing the top sheet, and was glad because it pleased me. One thing only was I sorry about and that was that I was too untrained to reproduce the sweet expectant hush that lay all round, for nature in her tenderest mood was settling down to rest. The thrushes sang a good night song, rooks cawed grumpily overhead and winged their heavy flight to roost, small feathered things twittered sleepily in a thousand treble tones, while the buzz of homing insects and the lowing of unseen cattle rounded off the symphony.

Suddenly my attention was attracted by a nearer noise, and turning with a start I beheld a ragged man wheeling off my machine. Gathering up my things I started after him. He tried to mount, but being out of practice or, because he had a fear of me, he found the job too difficult, so down the dusty road he ran, wheeling my machine before him; with me after him angrily shouting and hurling awful threats. After a little while he tired of

his race and stopping in the road, with the bicycle held behind his back, faced his fierce pursuer.

Seeing how small and insignificant I was he laughed to think he'd flown away from me, and letting fall the bike upon the wayside came at me with a gnarled and knobby cudgel in his fist. I quailed as he approached and feared my bike and I were like to part forever, for nimble as I was I could not hope for anything but violence and cruel blows at the hands of such a burly tramp. Just then putting my hand in my pocket to protect my precious paints, my fingers fell on the barrel of my toy pistol. I have spoken of this pistol once before, of how it worked with double action, and might in a fading light even be mistaken for a real one, especially by a person who, like this thief before me, had crime upon his conscience. So when he came at me with cautious tread, suddenly I whipped my toy out my pocket and laying the gleaming barrel upon my sleeve advanced with shaking knees upon my foe.

He stood like one transfixed for an instant, then rising upright turned and ran again for the machine; but my younger legs were far too swift for him this time, so that when he reached it there stood I, astride my fallen steed, flashing fierce defiance at him from gleaming eyes and hand. The distant purring of a motor coming down the road reached his ears, and making up his mind in one

swift flash, he scrambled through the hedge and slunk to the shelter of the woods.

Quick as thought I jerked my bicycle right side up and wheeled it on to the path in safety just as a large red car passed rapidly over the spot whereon it had so lately lain.

I watched the car out of sight, then gathering my sketching materials from out the several pockets wherein I had so hurriedly stored them, fell to strapping them again in place behind the saddle. At once I missed my water pot and after that my drawing, so I must needs retrace my steps along the dusty road for fear that in my eagerness to save my bike I had dropped them by the way-side. Sure enough my pot was there, lying on its side with its mouth choked with mud; but though I searched for near an hour, perilously near to tears, my picture was as surely gone as was the twilight scene which had inspired it!

## CHAPTER II

### ENTER THE HEROINE

NIGHT found me pedalling wearily across an open moorland, knowing nothing of my whereabouts; but as it was very warm and there was a plentitude of shrubs with deep recesses full of invitation, I soon wheeled my machine off the road and spreading my waterproof on the ground, lay down beneath a spreading thorn.

A gentle rustle at my feet caused my heart to thump and the hair stood up upon my head; but I laughed when I discovered a rabbit nibbling busily scarce a yard from where I lay, and beyond him another and yet another and scores and scores of them in every open glade. Rising very warily I sat up and, putting my fingers between my teeth, blew a shrill blast. On an instant the lambent moon shone on a field of dancing snowflakes as their little ghostly tails flitted here and there in an ecstasy of panic, and all had vanished save two which bobbed and jumped for one more uncertain moment and then they, too, were gone. Laughing for pure mischief that I had so fully repaid the scare they had given me I lay back again, and

watched the stars, till they and all things drifted into oblivion.

The noisy carolling of larks aroused me. I espied a farmhouse high upon a rise, glaring white against the blue and eagerly I wheeled toward it.

Soon I was in the great kitchen, seated alone at a great table, with hams suspended from the rafters above my head and two great sides of bacon curing in the chimney, while a very china shop of crockery twinkled at me from the dresser. A large tabby cat purred eternal friendship beside me and a kitten played unceasingly with my boot lace on the red brick floor below. A canary sang a frantic song between the much beflowered curtains, a thrush answered from its wicker cage without, the clamour of ducks and geese vied with the cackling of fowls, while the grunting of pigs, the lowing of kine and the barking of a large retriever combined to make an excellent orchestra.

Do not wonder that I am moved to describe this feast so fully when I say that it was the first meal I had ever sat down to free and untrammelled, and the last satisfying food I was destined to taste for many a weary day. Never before, nor since, have I tasted such eggs, such generous rashers, and such butter, fresh from the dairy. The scent of the coffee and the new made bread stayed with me throughout the day and, for a full hour, I sat feast-

ing until, from very repletion, I was obliged to call a truce and mount my bike again.

“When the gorse is out of flower then is kissing out of fashion,” sing the sages of the West, and surely with such a riot of luxuriant colour as met my eager eyes that day it must have been the very festival of kissing, and all the world bent on loving!

The road turned sharply to the right through a double line of sentinel elms whose arms held high above their heads made a bridal arch under which I sped. There were sun-lit pasture lands beyond, so putting more of weight upon my pedals I checked the wild impulse of my steed and broke into song again.

Clickety clack,  
I'll never go back,  
While my name is Jack.

What was wrong with the bicycle? Not being either a cyclist or a mechanic I could not say, all that I was certain of was that something serious was suddenly amiss, for the more I tried to bring her under control the faster she sped, while her whole frame seemed to shake with mocking laughter. We were at the top of a long hill now, so I kept my hands firmly gripped upon the handles so that I might steer her clear of obstacles. I still was master of my destiny. So when I saw

that the road took a sharp curve to the right, full of hope that here the hill would surely end and rise again, I steered my maddened runaway around the bend.

Then I saw a girl, coasting easily on a free wheel, come out into the road from a lane some way ahead of me while at the same time a drove of cattle meandered clumsily at the bottom of the hill! I knew that I was at grips with fate!

Quick as light I reasoned out that if the cattle kept to my left side and the girl continued as she was, on the right, all would be well, so setting my teeth I steered straight for the middle way. But presently, without apparent motive a big black beast, detaching himself from the bunch, ambled across and with lowered head awaited the girl's approach. Demoralised with fright she swerved first this way and then the other, while I called frantically to her to keep straight on. Unheedful of the consequences I steered straight between the two, and with the speed of an express train one of my handles locked with hers while the other drove with fearful force into the ribs of her assailant.

The next moment, leaving my saddle like a shot from a gun, I sailed through the summer air in a graceful parabola straight into a field of wheat.

A raucous bellowing filled the air, and, gazing over the hedge, I saw a man in corduroys trying

to still a restless herd, while a boy of about my own age, plodded up the hill in frantic haste behind a sable steer, who cared not where he went so long as he put space between himself and the awful thing that had o'er taken him.

A faint whimpering came to me from a low thorn bush just inside the hedge, and glancing up I saw my little lady safely deposited upon the top and crying softly to herself. I reached up an awkward hand. She placed her own in it and after much manœuvring with skirts, she dropped lightly to the ground.

“Thank you,” she said, breathlessly. “Oh, thank you! You have saved my life.”

I blushed a fiery red at this and grinning very sheepishly turned away my head, for I didn’t dare to look at her.

“You good, brave boy!” she went on. “You might have killed yourself! How can I ever thank you?”

“Oh — it’s nothing, Miss,” I stammered. “I — I — I couldn’t help it.”

The next moment she had rushed to me and impulsively throwing her warm young arms about my neck, had kissed me on the mouth! Was there ever such a situation? I wished that the earth would open and swallow me up. Still on the whole it was not unpleasant, so lifting up my eyes very modestly I gazed fully into hers.

Her eyes were violet!

"Oh, you're not hurt then," she said. "I'm so glad."

"Not a bit, Miss, thank you," I answered.  
"Are you?"

"Oh, no!" she replied, "just a little shaken, and you — you saved my life! Oh! that horrid cow!"

With her head on my shoulder she gave way to frantic sobs. Seeing her distraught and recalling how she had kissed me and thinking it might comfort her, I raised her face and did the like to her.

"It wasn't a cow," I said. "It was a bull."

She tore herself away from me, looking very coy and pink and very shocked and maidenly.

"Oh you bold boy!" she scolded. "Why did you do that?"

"For the same reason that I ran into you," I answered. "Because I couldn't help it."

"But you must, you know," she said, looking very full of reproof. "If you couldn't help saving my life, you must at least help doing things like that, or I shall not like you."

"You did it to me," I retorted.

"That was gratitude," she answered, "and quite a different matter. Now help me over the hedge like a good boy and find my poor machine for me."

Climbing nimbly back over the hedge I took her

in my arms, but very reverently this time. She was about my own age and a fairy for lightness, and her chestnut hair flew up in a great cloud around her head as she jumped down on to the path.

Her bicycle lay under mine and they were badly mangled. Disentangling them with much of cunning strategy, I was moved to remark how poor and shabby my gallant steed appeared in contrast with the graceful lines of hers, and having stood it upright I saw with a sudden start that my chain was gone!

“What’s done that?” I demanded, dumfounded.

“Is it ruined? You must let my father buy you another bicycle, if it is.”

“No, miss,” I answered. “I’ve just found out my chain is off and that’s the reason I came down the hill so fast and pitched you over the hedge.”

“And saved my life?”

“Oh, no! I think it was you who saved mine.”

“But that bull would have tossed me if you hadn’t come.”

“And I would have charged the lot if you hadn’t swerved and filled up the only bit of road I could get through; and then I *should* have been done for.”

She looked at me a moment with doubting eyes.

"I don't believe you. You're telling fibs! You are trying to make out that it was all an accident, because you won't admit how brave you are."

"Well, where's the chain then?"

"You'll find it soon enough when I have gone," she said, unconvinced.

"Search me," I insisted.

She put her tiny hands into my jacket pockets and took therefrom some broken crocks and the fragments of a toy pistol.

"Why, what are these?" she asked, laughing.

At sight of them I was overcome with deep compassion for myself.

"Oh dear!" I cried, "my pistol's gone, and my poor old pot!"

"Were you very fond of them?"

"More than of anything else I've got," I answered, with feeling.

"You funny boy. I am so sorry."

She popped them into her pocket.

"What are you going to do with them?" I demanded, anxiously.

"Keep them of course. They are the broken lance and drinking horn of the gallant knight who saved me from the fiery dragon. I intend to keep them always so that when I look at them I'll think of brave — What is your name?"

“I am called Prince Arthur by those who love me,” I answered, smiling.

“Oh, how lovely!” she cried, clapping her hands with pure delight. “Father always calls me Princess Ida, though my real name is Margery.”

“Then Princess Ida you shall be to me, but —” and I halted at my boldness, “I too must have a token by which I can always remember the sweet princess who saved me from being mangled by the herd of wild bulls.”

She was somewhat taken back at this; but being imbued with the spirit of romance she answered with a mocking bow.

“It is for Prince Arthur to ask and the Princess Ida will — consider his request.”

My eyes glanced over her dainty form, noting the glistening eyes and ripe red lips, the dazzling, glorious hair that framed her soft young cheeks. There was a ribbon in her hair, so reaching out my hand I untied it and held it up before her eyes.

“This I will have, my fair princess,” I announced, and twining it around my finger placed the silken roll within my pocket.

So we gathered up our broken mounts, and now that the time was near for us to part I felt a sickly sinking in my breast.

“Which way do you go, Princess?” I asked.

“Why back again, Prince, to my home up the

lane yonder to change my things, while John takes my machine into the village to get it mended. Which way do you go?"

"Up the hill to find my chain and then to the same place as John, wherever that may be?"

"Why, don't you know?"

"Not I. I am but passing through on my way to London."

"Oh! Well, just a mile down the hill and straight ahead there's a very good cycle shop. You've an awful long way to go to get to London. When will you reach there?"

"Why, how far is it?" I asked, startled.

"Ninety miles, father tells me. He goes there by motor in a day."

I hated to leave her so I went a trifle up the winding lane where she pointed out a large, substantial house, set in a nest of verdure, which she said was her abode. I promised to write to her as soon as I was settled and she, placing her little hand in mine, looked with such a look at me that my heart leaped for joy.

Then she dropped her violet eyes and blushed, while she said, so softly that I had to bend to hear, "Prince Arthur, is there any way in which I can repay you?"

I drew her face to mine.

"One for remembrance," I whispered, and kissed her once again upon the lips.

Instantly she fled from me; but just before the bend in the road had nearly swallowed her up she waved her little hand to me and was gone!

## CHAPTER III

### THE END OF MY BICYCLE

Down the lane and up the hill I went in a turmoil of emotion. The sweet contentment in my heart warred with savage resentment at my lot. She was a little lady, with the world at her feet, and I a wandering pot boy, at the mercy of the world's kicks and cuffs. However, I tried to treat my adventure lightly, and when presently I espied my truant chain half trampled in the dust, I picked it up and went off down the hill trundling my battered bicycle.

Below I found a little village nestling in the lovely valley, and in its quiet street under shadow of the quaint old church was a bicycle repair shop. I made straight for it and hammered on the door. My second summons brought out a knowing looking man with a cigarette in his mouth.

“ ‘Ello!” he cried. “ Who’s this tired kid?”

“ I’ve had a fall,” I answered, mildly, “ and damaged my machine.”

“ Damidged it? Damidged it d’yer sye? Yer don’t mean to sye yer call that damidged, do yer?”

“ Well,” said I, “ what do you call it?”

“ Spiffed, my boy, absolootely spiffed. Wot

yer bin up to? Playin' steeplechasin' or robbin' the ark?"

"I fell down the hill with it," I answered, somewhat nettled at his manner, "and I want you to repair it for me, my good man."

"Wot?" he almost shrieked. "Repair that thing? Take it awye!"

"But it only wants the chain mended," I protested in alarm.

"Take it to the British Mooseum where yer pinched it from an' tell 'em you'll never pinch their ole iron again."

He looked me over, curiously.

"Where did yer dig it up from? Did ole Methooselum leave it to yer?"

"No," I replied, stiffly. "I bought it less than a month ago."

He appeared deeply shocked.

"Bought it, did yer sye? Strike me pink! Yer didn't sye yer bought it!"

I grew hot at his insolence.

"Yes, I did," I retorted. "What's that got to do with you?"

"'Ow much did yer give for it, sir?" he demanded.

"Three pounds ten," I answered. "Why? Isn't it a good bicycle?"

He leant his back beside the jamb and mopped his brow.

“ ‘Arry,” he called into the shop. “ I’m goin’ ter faint.”

In response came another man, short and spare, with greasy overalls and capable looking hands.

“ Hullo, Charlie! ” he said. “ What’s the row about? ”

Charlie pointed me out to his partner with his thumb.

“ I want my bicycle repaired,” I told Harry.

He looked at my machine with arms akimbo the while he shook his head.

“ Past it, my boy,” he said, “ absolutely past it. Pay you better to buy a new one.”

At this point Charlie chipped in again.

“ Strike me bloomin’ pink, ‘e give free an’ a ‘arf quid for it! ”

“ You don’t mean to say that? ” Harry inquired, in quick alarm.

“ Yes,” I answered with failing heart.  
“ Why? ”

“ My boy,” he retorted, solemnly, “ you’ve been done. That machine’s at least seven years old and not fit for any one to ride.”

“ An’ ‘e come down the Terrace ‘ill on it, ‘Arry! You’d better see a doctor, young man. You’re goin’ potty, barmy on the crumpet.”

I was getting really alarmed now for ‘Arry’s judgment carried conviction with it, so I ignored the other while I addressed my remarks to him.

“But I must get it repaired,” I said, “I’ve got to get to London on it.”

“You mustn’t go another mile on it, my boy,” he declared. “It’s suicide to ride it. Why how far have you come on it?”

I told him.

“My sainted aunt!” he answered, amazed. “You *are* a lucky chap.”

“If you’re so canned on chuckin’ yer money awye,” Charlie chipped in again, “I’ll patch the bloomin’ thing up for yer for a quid, so as it won’t break yer silly neck for yer wivout givin’ yer fair warnin’!”

“What’ll you do for half a quid?” I asked, a gleam of hope arising within my bosom.

“Tike it rarnd to the back an’ burn it, an’ sive yer fooneral expenses for yer.”

“Very well,” I said, “give me a pound’s worth.”

“Righto! But show us yer money fust.”

Nettled at this implication I dived my hand into my pocket and held out contemptuously for him to see — twopence halfpenny in bronze and a sixpence! Dumfounded and speechless with horror, for I had yet ninety miles to travel, I looked at him with beseeching eyes.

“I — I’m afraid I’ve lost it,” I stammered. “It must have come out of my pocket when I shot over the hedge.”

"Shot over the rats," he answered, incredulously. "I s'pose yer goin' ter arst me wot I'll give yer fer the scrap 'eap next."

"What will you give me for it?" I asked, grasping at a straw.

"I'll give yer a thick ear if yer don't 'op lively," he replied, with sudden ferocity.

"But I've got some more money in London," I protested.

"Well 'op off an' get it afore some one else pinches it — go on," he answered, and he looked so menacing that, thinking discretion the better part of valour, I dragged my heap of ruins sadly off and went back from whence I'd come.

Up the hill I trudged again as quickly as I could, bent on saving my scattered wealth, and if Fred Powell, the grocer's boy, survived half the ills I wished him at that hour, he is by now a maimed and mangled mockery of a man, worthy of the pity of a heart of stone.

Presently nearing the spot where I had fallen I beheld a strange procession coming down the hill towards me. A diminutive cart, resembling the wagon of a pioneer settler of the wild West, was being drawn by a donkey that was led by a swarthy man with rings in his ears, and underneath the wagon's hood on a heterogeneous collection of odds and ends sat a brown skinned child of not more than three, contentedly smoking a cigar-

ette. Dumb with amazement I stared at him. A gaudy caravan followed in his wake, another followed close behind and yet again a third, each escorted by youths and men who for complexion and habiliments were blood brothers of the first, the while the whole emitted an effluvia nauseating and intense.

All of a sudden I saw a youth run out in haste to the spot where I had fallen and begin to scramble about with his hands amid the grass. Was he gathering together my scattered gold and silver? I was on him in a bound. I caught him by the collar before he had time to rise and over in the dust we rolled with him beneath. I just had time to note his glare of mingled anger and surprise when pressing his heavy boot against my stomach he shot me clear.

I was up on my feet in an instant. I glared at him, and ground my teeth with pent up fury, and seeing in him the embodiment of all my evil luck I sailed into him blind with rage and fear.

“That’s my money,” I screamed, aiming at his ear.

“Garn! I found it,” he answered, parrying.

“I dropped it here,” I retorted, as I warded a terrific punch at his stomach.

“You’re a liar!” he bellowed, emphasising the declaration with a punch upon my nose.

"Thief!" I roared as the blood streamed forth.

Twice he had me in the dust and once I caught him full and square upon the eye so that he spun round like a well whipped top and landed on his face. I waited his uprising, when on to him again I flew like a wild cat. He came at me with arms extended and I hit him in the ribs, and when he came at me again, I landed full on his chest.

Bleeding, puffed and swollen, and gasping for breath, he realised that he was like to lose, so rushing at me like a bull he lifted up his foot and aimed a vicious kick below my belt, but before it reached its mark I caught his foot deftly in my hand and brought him to the ground. Then behold a storm arose around me. I was pushed and punched and kicked and struck with sticks so that I was near to lose my senses, and I verily believe I had been slain had not a woman who had been watching from the back of a van come to my rescue.

"Leave him alone!" she shouted. "Leave him alone! 'E is de ver' boy I tell you about. Do you want de Goddam p'lice upon our track? Hey?"

And lying there half stunned while my assailants helped their wounded champion into the van and started down the hill again, I was amazed in my heart, for the voice was the voice of a gipsy crone but the speech was the speech of Beppo!

## CHAPTER IV.

### I PURSUE MY JOURNEY

I LAY where I was for a long time, hearing faintly, seeing dimly, thinking not at all, conscious only of a dull aching in my limbs, in my head, in all my bones and flesh. Then a startling thought occurred to me. Supposing she who lived so close should come this way and see me thus? Perish the thought! Never on my life should Princess Ida venture here and find her fairy prince so lowly laid, except in her sweet service. So springing up with such vigour as to set all my bones ajingle and make my battered flesh cry out in protest I steadied myself against the hedge, and opening my swollen eyelids as widely as I might, looked, cautiously, up and down the road.

Nothing was in sight in all that stretch of hill but my poor, battered bicycle. There she lay where I had thrown her, and by now she was most surely done for, for those same gipsy caravans had passed their wheels right over her. Staggering towards her I searched my storage place behind the saddle. My mackintosh was gone, but my

little sketching outfit, bent and twisted as it was, I still could save; so I unstrapped it with much thankfulness.

My poor old battered machine I lifted laboriously and pitched out of sight behind the hedge. Having thus rid me of a thing that had brought much of sorrow and little of joy into these furious fleeting days I scrambled through after it, and searching out the low thorn that had caught my little lady in her fall, crept like a sickly dog beneath its grateful shade.

And so it came to pass that presently I fell into a deep and dreamless sleep, and when in God's good time I awoke again it was to see the stars twinkling down on me, and every fibre of my growing frame calling aloud for food. Never had I been so famished and thirsty as now, for not a bite or drop had passed my lips since that never to be forgotten breakfast of the morning, the very thought of which made my mouth water. It was now midnight or early morning of the next day, or even the day after that for aught I knew, and with my meagre treasury and ninety miles to walk economy blazoned forth her virtues with clarion call. But even were I possessed of all the fabled wealth of Eldorado, where was I to find an inn at such a time as this?

Still fearful that were I to spend the night here my Princess might come this way and see me in the

morning, I made up my mind on the instant to put as many miles as might be between us ere yet the sun was up, so feeling much refreshed and infinitely less stiff and sore, I scrambled through the hedge again and out into the road. I was barely through when the headlights of a motor coming up the hill flashed full upon the grass beneath my hands, and seeing therein a shining silver disc my fingers grasped it, thankfully, and looking at its face I saw that it was a half a crown! A half a crown and ninety miles to London! I gazed about me, frightened and alarmed. But it was only for a moment that terror swept over me for was I not a country boy, sturdy at heart, and had not my life fitted me to cope with just such a situation? With a resolute mien I stepped out on the road to London.

And it was not so hard a jaunt after all. A farmer going to market took me ten miles on my way, a doctor in an auto carried me twenty-five, and a sweet-faced old lady at whose house I stopped for a night emptied out a hidden hoard in a teapot to buy me a railway ticket. She packed me a lunch and mended my stockings, and when I started down the road, ran after me and kissed me because I resembled a little brother who had been lost at sea. The ninety miles to London became sixty, became forty, thirty, twenty, until, finally, I stood weary and footsore, but resolute

as Dick Whittington, on a bridge that spanned the Thames and gazed on a wonderful vision.

It was London, at last, London of the mighty streets, of the court and courtiers, of authors, singers, painters, the wonder of England and the World!

Before me there gleamed a wondrous scene. A great mauve dome belonging to some fairy palace rose on dazzling pillars as of alabaster, and on its crest, uplifted on transparent threads that caught a salmon lustre from the sun, a great gold ball and cross reared up against a sky blue as the forget-me-nots in a country garden.

I stood enraptured, with head held high, while a kindly policeman in shiny cape smiled at my ecstasy.

“Is that Saint Paul’s Cathedral?” I gasped.

“Saint Paul’s, my son, it is,” he answered.  
“Where do you want to go?”

“I want to get to Mall Road,” I replied, my mind still adrift.

“Mall Road, Mall Road,” he mused. “I never heard of it.”

“Never heard of it?” I cried. “Why this is London, isn’t it?”

“Ah! this is London right enough, sonny. You don’t mean Mare Street, do you?”

“No, sir,” I answered. “Mall Road.”

“Never ‘eard o’ Mall Road. There’s Mare

Street, 'Ackney, and there's Pawl Mawl, and — ah — there's the Mall, but there ain't no 'ouses in the Mall. Whereabouts does it lie? "

"I don't know, sir, but it's somewhere near the West Strand Post Office."

"Ah — then I should go there, sonny," he said.

So thanking him again I went upon my way.

This London I was in oppressed me overmuch, for whereas I had pictured to myself a busy centre not unlike our own market town some seven miles from the Goat and Compasses, I found myself within a mighty forest where houses grew instead of trees, and where there were more people at once in one street than were to be found in a week of market days at home.

However would I be able to find Alec in all this multitude, even though I had his address? I sighed for sheer incompetence, the while, foot-sore, hungry and weary, I searched each passing face and form until my eyes were strained and my head adaze at this unwonted effort.

Then the unexpected happened, for while crossing a road that sprang into the Strand just past the Adelphi Theatre, I heard a wild scuffle and a shout and was caught up by strong and bony hands, and patted and caressed and crooned over in such an absurd and ridiculous manner, that I was very much ashamed to be thus seen. A new Alec stood before me. His shining hat was gone and

on its place reposed a broad brimmed felt, while the long brown ulster had given place to a black coat, bedecked as to collar and to cuffs with ancient fur where the moth had long since tired of holding revelry.

But it was the same Alec, for when the first exuberance of his delight was over, he rushed me into an eating house and set oysters and stout before me.

I had tasted stout before, "drawn from the wood," as Father used to say, but never before had I tasted Guinness's, because that it was a drink fit only for gentlefolk, so having put my lips deep down so that the soft and umber foam caressed my nose, I took a long and grateful draught and felt that I was born again.

And while I revelled in my banquet I watched with ever roving eyes the scene around me, the busy hum of conversation blended with the intermittent strumming of a piano somewhere overhead that rattled out a thin and tuneless dance, and the shrieks and crescendo of a chorus down the street, and I noticed that all the talk was of the stage and all these people bore the stamp of an unconquerable rebellion against all ordered things, and each one bore himself with as much condescension towards his fellows as if he alone were Sol himself and these others but lesser stars. One in particular made some inquiries about me.

“Who’s the juvenile? What’s his line?” he demanded. “Musical?”

“No,” answered Alec, “out upon thee, Bob! I would he had a fancy for the profession.”

“He ought to make a good heavy when he grows up,” commented Bob. “He’s got imagination.”

“Aha! there’s many a true word,” replied Alec, “spoken in haste. He’ll make a painter unsurpassed, will my little prince.”

“Oh! is that his name?”

“No,” said Alec, “his name is —”

“Yes,” I broke in, hurriedly, “Arthur Prince is my name, though Alec has a fancy for turning it round.”

“And calling you Prince Arthur,” replied the actor. “How like the dear old boy!”

Whereat Alec looked at me with eyes exceeding wide and flat denial on his lips, so that I nudged him harshly in the ribs and made him spill his whiskey.

## CHAPTER V

### THE HOME OF ART

WE went to Alec's home by way of a Hammer-smith bus; a new experience for me as well as a delightful one, to sit a perch and have the great Alec point out the objects of interest on the road. Nelson's Monument we saw and the houses of Parliament and the National Gallery, and later the Knightsbridge Barracks where soldiers with red plumes and naked swords drilled just within the great doors. Finally getting down from the bus we entered Mall Road, which runs to the river. There was a sad and sorrowful air of "has been" about this street, and the houses called to mind pictures of ancient queens who had lived too long. The loosely hanging gate of one hundred and three was open and the steps needed sweeping.

Alec rattled his key in the lock of the front door and flinging it open, bade me enter with old time grace and courtesy. Immediately a thin voice, somewhat querulous and not a little cultured, floated up from the lower regions.

"Is that you, Alexander?"

"Yes, my sweetest poppet."

"Oh! Alexander, where *have* you been?"

Before he could answer, a door to my right opened and a young man in pyjamas blinked out at us.

“Where’s my ballyboots? D’ye ’ear, Alec? Where the ’ell’s my ballyboots?”

My blood boiled at this, so looking him up and down most angrily I saw his boots were on his feet.

“You silly ass!” I retorted, taking up the cudgels for my friend, “you’ve got them on.”

“Who the dickens are you,” he demanded, “to call a gennleman a silly ass? I woan be called silly ass by you. D’ye ’ear? How the devil can I have ’em on when I’ve only just gorrup? Eh?”

“Well, what are those then?” I replied pointing to his feet.

He looked at them again steadily for a while, hiccoughing softly to himself. Then taking them off very quickly and skilfully he flung them at my head.

“You go an’ clean ’em, boy,” he shouted. “That’s all you’re fit for. Go an’ clean my boots, d’ye ’ear, ye silly ole Alec-silly-sander?”

Whereupon I picked them up and was about to cast them back at him when Alec took them firmly from me, and promised the young man that his wishes would be attended to. The latter retired, hiccoughing and slamming his door.

“Who’s he?” I asked.

"You mustn't take any notice of him," answered Alec in a low voice, "he's our best lodger, a bit of a trial, Jim, but he keeps the box office open."

So along the barren passage and down the dark bare stairs we went, he first to guide my steps, I following, and as we went a woman's voice came out of the front room.

"Oh, *Alexander!* it's *long* past lunch time. Where *have* you been and *what* is the matter with Mister Bardilow?"

"Drunk again, my dear," he answered.

Then bidding me to stay beside the door he entered the room, and I saw that on the sofa by the window a woman, somewhat short and round and faded, with straw coloured hair, reclined with a fashion paper in her hands. A pink dressing gown was fastened at her waist with a bright blue sash while dingy white satin shoes adorned her feet and barely hid the holes in one magenta stocking.

An open piano stood against the wall, on which some tattered music sagged over to the keyboard; sheets of music rested on the stool and piles of music littered the top of the instrument, while music lay unheeded and uncared for on the floor.

A bald headed canary in the window essayed to burst his aged throat with song, heedless of the dirty draggled curtains between which he had his

home; while photograph on photograph, some unframed and others decked with plush or tarnished silver, littered the mantelpiece, the side-board, the piano top and walls.

Alec bent above his wife and, lifting off his hat, gallantly kissed her on the brow.

“My darling,” he said, nervously, “the jewel has dropped from out the clouds and fallen in my lap.”

She looked sternly at him a moment.

“Alexander, you’ve been drinking again,” she said.

“My sweetest poppet!”

“Then what on *earth* have you got into your head now?”

“At the corner of Bedford Street this very day he fell upon my heart like this,” and he thumped his old and shrivelled chest in violent illustration.

“Who did? What are you talking about, and where is the jewel?”

As if this were the cue he was waiting for, as if indeed this were the very psychological moment, he swung around and stretched out his hand.

“My prince, come in and be presented,” he cried, tragically.

Awkwardly I shuffled through the doorway and into that august presence, and at sight of me the lady scrambled into a sitting posture, and fussed about with her dressing gown, her odds and ends

of lace and her hair, the while she hastily endeavoured to remove her gloves.

Then Alec, the master of ceremonies, performed the ancient rite of introduction.

“Prince Arthur, come and be presented to my well beloved wife and partner of my joys and sorrows, Mrs. Alexander Hannibal Pond, known to the music loving confrères of your father’s generation as Miss Muriel Mucilage. My dear, Prince Arthur.”

I bowed.

She held out a haughty hand which I shook with much confusion.

Then looking me over approvingly she enquired:

“Do you hope to grace the boards?”

“Do you mean the stage?”

She bowed assent.

“Oh, no,” I answered. “I don’t think I should like it.”

“He?” said Alec; “out upon thee, Rosamond! No mere painted frippery for him! He is a budding artist of such rare genius that never has there shone his like.”

“*What a pity!*” she answered, looking tired and disappointed. “I hoped you had a wish to do something useful. It *always* makes me sad to see a clever youth, one who is cursed with love of music, painting, drama, or any of the arts; for I

*know, alas too well, how bitter is the fate in store for him, and I know, also, that however much a person of experience may try to dissuade him from it, that you are only dubbed a fool for your pains.*"

"But what can you do with one who is born with the spark within him?" asked Alec, almost defiantly.

"Strangle him at birth, Alexander, as *I* would have done you, had *I* been your mother," she replied.

He changed the subject.

"Our noble prince has come to live with us a while."

"Alexander!"

"Oh! Mrs. Pond," I broke in, hurriedly, "when Alec wrote to me some months ago offering me a home, I wrote him I would come and sent him some money to pay for my keep."

"Then you are the boy from Ravenhurst," she said, with an air of relief.

"Yes."

"But his name was not Prince, it was Sturgess."

"Mrs. Pond, when Mother died that way, my father died, too, for me, and I'd rather be called Prince, if you please."

Whereat she bade me come closer, and drawing my face down to hers she kissed me soundly so that I had to bite my lips for fear that I should cry.

"My money will keep me," I said, sobbing, "until I can earn some more."

"Earn some?" she queried.

"I painted a picture and sold it on the road," I asserted.

"You did?" she exclaimed. "Oh, *what* a pity. Oh, *what* a dreadful calamity."

"Why?"

"Because it only encourages you and leads you on."

I smiled, and soon I was telling her the story of my travels, so that time passed unheeded, and a bumping and bustling overhead went by unnoticed, until a violent and incessant tinkling of a cracked bell cut short my reminiscences.

"*What* on earth *is* the matter with Mr. Bardilow," asked Mrs. Pond, querulously. "Alexander, *do* go and see."

"Angels and ministers of grace defend us!" cried Alec. "It's his boots. I forgot all about 'em."

As Alec took his way to the kitchen I followed him and seeing him prepare to brush the boots I tried to snatch the brushes from him and do it in his stead, but he protesting, we compromised, he blacking one the while I made the other shine.

Afterwards Alec took me out the back door and up the three stone steps into the tiny garden, and showed me his fowls and his rabbits, while his

dogs, a terrier, a whippet, an airedale and a woolly sheep dog, gambolled round him and licked his hands, while they sniffed my legs in deep suspicion. And he told me all about Mr. Bardilow, who was a medical student of great promise and wealth, but unfortunately had an overfondness for alcohol.

He told me, also, that he had four other lodgers, an army captain who lived nobody knew how, a salesman in a furniture shop, whom I would see soon, and a young lady, an embryo authoress and a red hot socialist, who fraternized with exiled Russian nobles who had left their native land for that land's good.

Then tea was announced, after which he hurried off to town to take his part in his melodrama, and I went early to my little room overlooking the street, being eager to revel, in the luxury of pillows and sheets.

## CHAPTER VI

### I SEEK A LIVELIHOOD

I LAY sleeping the next day well into the afternoon, when having breakfasted I set about the pleasant task of writing to my little lady so that she might know that at last I was in London. Sheets and sheets I filled, and still more sheets, with details of what I had endured, until there was such a goodly pile that neither Mrs. Pond nor I was possessed of an envelope large enough to hold them, so out I needs must go to purchase one.

Coming back I heard a cheery voice hailing me.

“Hello, young man, I hear you’re staying with us.”

I turned and it was Mister Bardilow, very spruce and clean and nicely brushed, in a morning coat and glossy hat, and, looking at his boots I saw that they were faultless.

“Yes,” I said, “I’ve come to London to try my luck.”

“I am afraid I was rude to you yesterday,” he continued.

“Yes,” I said, “you were.”

“Well, you needn’t be cross about it,” he retorted.

“I’m not cross,” I replied. “You asked me if

you were rude and I said you were because you were. You were drunk."

"Was I very drunk?" he demanded.

"Not very. I've seen men worse."

"Good Lord! You seem to be an authority — but you ought to have seen me in the morning — before I went to bed, for I was sober when I saw you.

"Did my boots hit you when I threw them at you?" he asked a moment later.

"No," I replied. "How are they?"

"Dazzling, lustrous, look at 'em!" He stood still that I might admire their sheen. "Did Alec clean 'em?"

"He put the stuff on, but I polished them."

"Did you now? Well that's very friendly of you. Come into my room and have a chat sometime when I'm better tempered than I was yesterday. I think you and I will like each other."

So we parted, he to his room, I up-stairs to mine.

And sitting at my little table I essayed to address my envelope but, alas, for the absent-mindedness of the artistic temperament! I had been so full of my adventure, so careless of where I went that I had clean forgotten to ask for her address!

The next few days I busied myself with drawing little pictures of interesting spots within Hammer-

smith. I did the hump-backed wooden bridge that crossed the creek down by "The Doves," I did "The Doves" itself, I painted the suspension bridge and the poplars on the Mall, the boat builder's yards, Chiswick Church and Hogarth's tomb, and took them round many a weary day in fruitless efforts to find a purchaser. Finding business hopelessly impossible within the suburb I put my drawings under my arm and sallied forth upon a bus to try my luck in the streets of London town.

At every shop I saw with pictures in the window I would stop and gaze, trying to get a glimpse of the ogre whose abode it was. Then with much of hesitation would I stand making up my mind to enter, and sometimes I stayed so long that my courage melted and without venturing inside I would fly precipitately. But when it happened that I could screw up sufficient pluck I would stumble blindly in with quaking knees and violent thumping of heart and stand speechless upon the mat, wishing I was out of it.

And so it came to pass that presently there was not a shop within the Strand or Piccadilly, Jermyn Street, Pall Mall, the Haymarket or thereabouts, that I had not at one time or the other forced myself to enter, and silently, or with halting tongue, displayed my precious wares. And still my stock grew ever larger while my hope grew ever smaller.

The weeks fled by, the months went after them, Christmas had come and gone and I hadn't sold a single sketch nor earned a copper coin, and my seven pounds ten had at last worked itself out and Mrs. Pond, though kindness itself, began, I knew, to feel me as a burden. Not that she ever said anything but there was something in her look, in her tones, in her manner, in the very air about her, which called to me and said that now at last I must give up my chimera and turn my hand to "something useful." Alec's theatrical position had ceased long since with the close of the Autumn season, so that Alec and his wife were neither of them in a sweet temper.

At last with a heavy heart I tried to get employment as a pot boy, but none would have me because I was too small and inexperienced, neither would they take me in the bar because I was not old enough.

Then one day going down Pall Mall, opposite Marlborough House, I saw a plate within a recess which said that Mister Martin Poldani lived therein, and that he was a dealer in works of art and vertu. Wondering that I had not seen it there before, I entered. There was a passage that led up some stairs, and opening the door at the top I found myself within a gallery, the like of which I had not seen before except at Ravenhurst.

At a small side table an old, old man whose snow-white hair fell down beyond his shoulders, stood rubbing at a canvas with a rag. Seeing me he ceased his labours and looked at me with keen but kindly eyes.

"Well," he said.

"Will you buy these?" I asked him, holding out my parcel.

"Yes, if they are any good," he answered. "But I'll look at them only on condition that if I like them and offer you a price you must accept it. I'm not going to have you show them to me and then when I have valued them for you, go and say to other dealers: 'Oh, Mister Poldani says they are worth so and so.' Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then show them to me."

So undoing my parcel I laid my work before him.

He looked at them very closely, then taking out a glass looked closer still, after which he handled them as if studying the paper they were done on, then holding them above his head looked through them to the light.

"No value," he said, finally, handing them back to me.

"None at all?" I queried, with heart gone down to zero.

He shook his head.

“I thought at first they had,” he said. “They looked to me like Lorrilow’s early ones, but they’re too new and the paper’s modern, so they are only copies and worthless. There would be merit in them, if original, as art, but from the collector’s standpoint they’re not worth tuppence.”

“But they are original,” I protested.

“Don’t tell me,” he snapped.

“But they are,” I persisted, grasping at a straw.

“They are worthless copies of Sir James Lorrilow’s early work. Don’t you dare to contradict me!”

“They can’t be, because I did them myself,” I said in a choking voice.

He looked at me very keenly as if he were trying to pierce my very soul, and I answered his look with one as steady as his own. Then after a bit he smiled.

“I am very old, nearly ninety, and have seen a lot of rogues and a few honest men, so can trust my eyes quite well, and you look truthful.”

“I did do them, sir,” I said, not knowing what else to say.

He shook his head.

“If you had said you swear that what you say is true, or had appealed to God or your honour, I should have known you were lying, but you didn’t. Here give them to me.”

Again taking my drawings he looked at them with a new interest.

"Wonderful work for a boy," he said.

"What do you do for a living?"

"Nothing, sir, only these."

"Do you sell them?"

"No, sir."

"Ah! the path an artist treads is very stony and beset with many pitfalls, with fearful disappointment at the end for most. Would you like to learn picture restoring?"

"Very much, sir."

"Well, come and see me on Monday; but I'd like to have two of these, if I may."

"Certainly, sir," I answered. "Take which of them you please."

And selecting those he liked he gave me two bright sovereigns, after which I went home on wings to tell Alec that the tide had turned, at last.

## CHAPTER VII

### FORTUNE'S TRICKS

I WAS home in time for tea, where my joyful news was received with acclamation. Alec was transported to flights of fervid prophecy, Mrs. Pond was quietly delighted and full of congratulations, Miss Purvis, the embryo authoress, was moved to remark that Martin Poldani was the greatest living authority on art, the furniture salesman, Mister 'Orace 'Illingdon by name, declared that he "would 'ave one with me on the strength of that," and the bald headed canary came out of his cage and with wings outspread squawked defiance to constituted authority as he helped himself to butter from the dish.

I kept five shillings to get my boots mended and reinforce my sadly battered wardrobe and handed the balance over to Mrs. Pond, so that I might in some manner liquidate my debt to her.

Monday found me at ten o'clock walking up and down the pavement in Pall Mall, watching the sentries changing guard at Marlborough House while I awaited the arrival of my benefactor, and soon a cab drew up, and out he came, very small and bent, with kindly eyes a-twinkle, and greeting

me, he led me up the stairs to his wonderful gallery.

Here he patted me on the back and told me a most amusing tale all in French, not a word of which I understood, and having finished it, he chuckled mightily, and seeing him amused and wishing to please him, I, too, laughed, heartily.

"I've been thinking a lot about you," he said. "I want you to begin work here next Monday morning, and I'll give you fifteen shillings a week until you are able to earn more. You don't mind what you do?"

"No, sir," I answered promptly. "As long as it's honest."

"Good boy, good boy, I was afraid you would say, Art."

Then he went to his desk and taking out four letters handed them to me.

"Now this is just to try your willingness. Take these round to the people they are addressed to, deliver them, and await an answer."

The first was addressed to a tailor in Saville Row, so going there, I delivered the note and awaited the reply.

After some conversation in low tones two men came out and measured me for a suit.

"What about the answer to my letter," I demanded, greatly puzzled.

"Tell Mister Poldani they will be delivered by

Friday," he said. "Will you kindly leave your address?"

In much wonder at this strange proceeding I gave him the address and departed with my other letters.

The next one took me to a hosier's in Piccadilly where I was asked my size in collars, shirts, hose, underwear and gloves, and being again informed that this was the answer to my note I told them where I lived, and they respectfully intimated that the things would be sent on that very day.

By that time I was aflame with gratitude and amazement and doubt as to the reality of it all, so I hurried down St. James Street and was soon pouring out a voluble tale of my incredible adventures into the ears of the dealer in art and vertu.

"Yes, yes, yes!" he said, somewhat testily, cutting me short. "I can't have you about the place like that!" and he pointed deprecatingly at my attire.

I stood speechless not knowing what to say.

After pottering about a bit and seeing me still standing there, he looked at me sharply.

"Well?"

"What else can I do, sir?" I asked.

"Go away, go away! There's a good boy. And come back again on Monday morning. I'm busy."

So thanking him very humbly I left him, wondering.

All that week I went about the house in a daze, anticipating I know not what of joy and honour and success. Alec told me, not once but a hundred times, that "There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flood leads on to fortune." While his wife remarked that there was "many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip." But when the clothes began to arrive Mrs. Pond caught the infection and agreed with her spouse that my luck had turned at last.

And what a collection it was! There were two suits, twelve shirts, twelve collars, twelve handkerchiefs, two neckties, six pairs of socks, two pairs each of boots and gloves, a bowler hat and a tweed cap, and all of superb quality and fit.

The Saturday night before I was to commence my duties, Mrs. Pond, Alec and I went to see "The Silver King" at Mister Bardilow's invitation, to inaugurate the great event, and after that we had a crab supper with a bottle of Pommery to drink to my success.

Sunday I walked to Richmond Park in all the glory of my tweeds, and going to bed early dreamt of glories unimaginable.

And now behold me in my black with my bowler hat upon my head, and in my gloved hand a shilling cherry wood stick which I thought was neces-

sary to complete the whole ensemble, standing opposite Marlborough House at ten o'clock Monday morning, waiting the arrival of my employer.

Half past ten and he had not come, eleven o'clock and no sign of him, twelve, half past twelve and one o'clock chimed from a near by steeple as, filled with apprehension, I kept my lonely guard. Two o'clock and I was getting hungry, three and I was feeling faint, four and human endurance could stand it no longer, so I turned my back upon Pall Mall and hurried home with heavy heart.

Ten o'clock on Tuesday morning found me there again, and at half past ten a strange man opened the door with a key. I followed him, my heart at rest, at last.

“What do you want?” he demanded.

“I want to come in. I’m working here,” I answered.

“No you’re not,” he replied.

“Yes, indeed, I am. Mister Poldani engaged me and I ought to have started yesterday,” I persisted.

“Nobody is engaged here because Mister Poldani is dead,” he announced.

“Dead?” I gasped.

“Yes, died Saturday night from heart failure, poor old chap. On his ninetieth birthday.”

Saying which he nodded to me curtly and went inside.

With heavy heart and sad, unseeing eyes I turned slowly away. I laughed a little bitterly when I recalled how fine I looked in all these clothes and how they were but a covering and that underneath there stalked nothing but a pauper after all!

I wasted all that day watching the idlers by the Serpentine, and the children swimming their model yachts across the raging waters of the Round Pond, eating out my heart that fate had been so cruel with me.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A DOCTOR SEEKS TO CLASSIFY AN INSECT

I GRIEVE to say that I was short and snappy with my friends. I told them little about my ill luck beyond the fact that the poor old chap was dead, and wouldn't listen when they pointed out how lucky I was to get such a stock of good clothes for nothing; but sulked and hid myself away, and found no consolation even in Mrs. Pond's playing which was always very beautiful. So when Mister Bardilow called me into his room and told me that he'd found a job for me I was ungracious enough.

"What sort of a job?" I demanded.

"Well, Jim," he said, somewhat haltingly, "it's like this. Doctor Redcar, the famous nerve and mental specialist, is in want of a smart and respectable boy to show the patients in and keep his instruments clean, and make himself generally useful."

"Is he healthy?" I asked.

"Healthy!" he gasped.

"Not likely to die?" I continued.

"Why, Jim, what a mobid chap you are! Haven't you got over the old picture dealer yet?"

Doctor Redcar is just over forty, six foot two in his socks, weighs sixteen stone and is an Irishman."

"Oh," I said. "Where does he live?"

"Off Cavendish Square. Jim, do you feel like taking it on?"

"I'm game," I answered.

"Good boy," he replied, with vigour. "I said you would. I spoke to him about you yesterday and he wants me to send you along."

"Thank you very much," I answered, beginning to thaw. "When shall I go?"

"To-morrow morning at half past eight, and you'll find him an awfully decent chap. He's a sportsman and an art collector and — and lots of funny things. Do you know, Jim, he's got the finest private collection of old masters, and things like that, of anybody in the world?"

"Has he?" I replied. "That might be useful."

"Rather! That's what I thought, and you never know where you'll land if a man like that takes an interest in you."

"Does he know anything about me?"

"Oh, yes, he knows your name is Jim and that there's a mystery about you."

"What did he say when you told him?"

"He said he loved a mystery and would sooner have you than an ordinary chap."

So on the following day, a half hour after eight I was waiting in the hall of the cheerful house in the street just off Cavendish Square, while a neat and pleasant maid took my letter of introduction to the great and mighty specialist in nervous and mental disorders.

In a moment she was back again, bidding me follow her. She took me along a passage with sudden turns and bends whose carpet dulled our footfalls so that we moved silently as ghosts, till coming to a door she knocks thereon and without waiting for an answer opens and ushers me in.

I started with surprise to see I was in a small gymnasium and on a mat before me stood a mountain of a man in white shoes and trousers and his undervest, who worked his powerful arms first up then down, then out, then in, with huge dumb-bells grasped in his mighty fists, while he counted in a muffled rhythm.

“Wan, two, tree, foor; wan, two, tree, foor; wan, two, tree, foor,” until he thought he’d had enough.

Then he put his dumb-bells down and slipping into a white sweater took my letter off the table.

“What’s it say inside it?” he inquired, shortly.

“I don’t know, sir.”

“Ye dern’t know?”

“No, sir.”

“But it was orpen?”

"Yes, sir. Mr. Bardilow gave it me like that."

"An' ye mane to tell me ye didn't read it?"

"No, sir, certainly not. The letter was meant for you."

"But ye knew it was about yerself?"

"Yes, sir, but it wasn't my letter."

He raised his hand to his head at this evidently intending to scratch it, but finding no hair on top, he brought it down to the close red fringe that grew above his ears.

Then he wrote on a pad of paper, speaking aloud as he wrote.

"The insect has a sense of honour."

Then he threw the letter over to me.

"Ye'd better have a look at ut," he said.

Thanking him I picked it up and this was the message:

"This is him. He's hot stuff. Bardilow, M.D."

"What's ye name?" he asked, when I had given it back to him.

"Jim," I answered.

He looked at me quizzically, and wrote once more upon his pad.

"The insect is the *James, vulgaris* Jim, classification unknown. Jim Unclassified. That's the name for you."

I smiled my agreement.

“Taake ye coat off, James,” he demanded, of a sudden.

I took it off.

“Show me yer hands.”

I showed them back and front.

“Put ‘em up.”

Instantly they shot above my head in the manner of the western desperado.

“Ah, come on out o’ that! None of yer yankee tricks. Put ‘em up British style.”

So I clenched my fists and stood on guard.

“Now punch me on the nose.”

Without a moment’s hesitation I sprang right at him, and before he could protect himself hit him square where he had told me. On which he shut his eyes and spluttered and taking out his handkerchief checked the thin red stream that began to show itself, and going to the pad again wrote.

“Quick and obedient — when it suits him.”

Then squaring up to me, he commanded:

“Do it again.”

Again I sprang, enjoying it immensely, but this time he caught my wrist and giving it a turn slewed me round so that I bent low down with my right hand forced behind my back, sheer up between my shoulder blades, and I was helpless.

“Now what are ye going to do about ut?” he asked, exulting.

"Nothing, sir."

"And why not?"

"Because I don't understand wrestling, sir."

So he let me go again and wrote upon his pad:

"Has a fair amount of wisdom as well as courage."

Then he pointed to his dumb-bells.

"Lift one of those above yer head," he ordered.

I tucked up my sleeves and bent down to the nearest one. The balls were large and round and I saw that each was stamped with the number twenty-five. So grasping the bell firmly I raised it off the ground, whereon it swung between my legs and threw me off my balance so that I sprawled upon my hands.

His fresh, clean-shaven face and violet eyes lit up with huge enjoyment.

"Ah, that's beaten ye!" he chuckled.

"Not yet, sir," I panted as I bent myself to another trial.

Grasping it in both my hands I slid it artfully along the ground until its weight were well between my feet, then resting my elbows upon my knees I forced it slowly up, sliding my arms along my thighs until I'd got it level with my hip, then bending over to the right I dug my elbow well within my ribs, and with the purchase thus gained slowly raised it level with my shoulder when, free-

ing my left hand, I lowered my body under it until to all appearance I was raising it with mighty thews above my head; then reversing the manœuvres I quickly slid it to the ground again and stood before him flushed and panting and with shining eyes.

“Good,” he said, approvingly. “I didn’t think it was in ye.”

Then going to the pad again he wrote:

“The insect is willing, has cunning and is a powerful gossoon.”

“Now, me bye,” he said, suddenly, sitting down in his chair and lighting himself a cigarette, “I’ll have ye know this. I’m a specialist in diseases and disorders of the brain and nerves, and people come to see me here who want a lot of delicate handling. It will be your duty to open the door to them, show them into the waiting room and into my consulting room in turn. Ye will be tactful, alert, attentive, and above all keep yer mouth shut. Ye will clean the brass on the door outside, keep my consulting room and instruments in order, and keep yer heavy hands off my collection.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Ye will live here, d’ye understand, and when the consulting hours are over you will make yeself useful about the house, and if I find ye’ve got anything in ye, I don’t know but I might let ye

help me in classifying my collection and cataloguing my insects, and ye might become me secretary."

"Thank you, sir."

"Ye will wear a livery wid buttons down the front, and work from seven in the morning until six at night, when you'll be free."

"Thank you, sir."

"And I'll pay ye seven shillings a week and your board."

"Thank you, sir."

"And ye'll start next Monday."

"I'd sooner start now, sir," I said, fearing what might happen before next Monday came.

"Sooner start now, would ye?" he exclaimed, highly pleased. "Then, bedad, ye'll start to-morrow."

After that I left him to make my arrangements with the Ponds and prepare myself for the new life in which art and all such useless trash would play no part and have no being.

## CHAPTER IX

### A SMELL OF PAINT

ALTHOUGH they were sorry that I must go so soon, my friends were all mighty pleased to hear I had at last cast anchor within a safe and well protected harbour, particularly Mrs. Pond, who thought that here was an environment which would in time wean me completely from my dangerous and fickle love. On the other hand Alec was keenly disappointed.

“ Jim,” he said, with much feeling, “ it grieves me to the core to see you going into bondage. How are the mighty fallen! Out upon thee for a luckless wight! ”

“ *Alexander*, ” protested his good wife, “ how *can* you put such thoughts into the child’s head. He is on the brink of a career and yet you’d pull him back so that he may walk on clouds! ”

So they squabbled with very kindly interest in my welfare, while I packed my few things into a box that Mrs. Pond had found for me. Alec came with me to the street off Cavendish Square and helped me with my little box, and promising to come to him on Sunday, I left him standing in the rain, a desolate picture of despondency.

Doctor Redcar sent me off at once to a tailor’s

in the Haymarket to be measured for my uniform, and as soon as I returned the trim and pleasant maid took me and introduced me to the house-keeper.

As I was not to start my duties until my livery was ready, she took me over the house so that I might grow familiar with it.

And what a house it was! A veritable treasure house of the wealth of all the ages. Arms and weapons adorned the walls in great profusion, Norman shields and lances crossed with battle axe and mace, while crusted helm kept guard above with many a secret locked behind its visor. Arms and weapons were there from Japan, arms and weapons from the Indies and from China and Peru; savage club and knife and spear with gaudy painted shield and mask and headdress spoke with silent eloquence of many a bloody foray in the dark spots of the earth, beyond civilisation's enlightening pale.

In the great reception room above there was enshrined upon the farthest wall an exquisite little Tintoretto, before which I stood enraptured and enthralled, not that I knew it for a Tintoretto until long afterwards, but I loved it for its own unequalled charm and loveliness, and Mrs. Bunn, the housekeeper, explained that this was the finest example of an old Italian master's work known to be in existence, and that its value was fabulous.

And everywhere were insects, insects in glass cases, insects in polished cabinets, insects in frames, in boxes and under crystal globes. Butterflies and beetles and bees, fearsome spiders, scorpions and centipedes, beautiful and hideous, fascinating and repulsive.

Only three rooms was I not allowed to enter. They were the Doctor's bedroom, his daughter's room and his study, which latter was a holy of holies to all that little household. Besides this house he had a country estate where he spent his week ends, and where his daughter lived the whole year through with her governess because she was weakly.

Soon I was right at home, dressed in a little linen coat, very industrious and full of content, polishing the small brass plate upon the door, the knocker whose rollicking smile always drew an answering grin from me, and the doorbells, one for day and one for night, on either side the portal. And later when my morning's work was done I sat upon an oaken bench in the hall, opposite a brightly painted mummy case, ready to open the door for fashionable invalids or those who thought that they were invalids, and afterwards to announce them to the doctor whose massive bulk and well stocked head were quite at their service.

Now although he seldom spoke to me, yet I got on very well with him. I knew that he was satis-

fied, because when I saw my friend, Mr. Bardilow, who was now a house surgeon at the hospital used to tell me what the doctor said. According to this report, "Jim was still unclassified but he hoped to stick a pin right through his middle and place him in his right category."

The little Tintoretto in its massive frame on the farther wall of the reception room, finding my heart unoccupied, crept into it, so that I made a compact with myself and saving what I could of my humble wages, bought a little box of oils and a palette, and a canvas of the same dimensions, and in the early mornings I used to beg the pleasant maid to let me help her with her dusting, and standing before my idol I would talk to it and worship it, and promised it that when the mornings were brighter and the sun was up betimes I would creep down there, when every one was fast asleep in bed, and make a feeble copy for my own.

So presently the Spring came, and Spring in time gave place to early Summer, and every morning I used to get up at half past four to work upon my copy. And when six o'clock had come I'd pack my things away and slink up-stairs again, leaving the windows wide open to let the smell of paint escape. That selfsame smell of paint was very nearly the cause of my undoing, for the doctor came in one morning and stood in the door-

way with his head held high, sniffing like a deer.

“Where the devil does the paint come from?” he asked.

“Paint, sir!” I answered, in very great surprise.

“Yes, paint. Can’t ye smell it?”

I shook my head in mute denial.

“Come here?” he commanded of a sudden, so that I approached him with much of inward apprehension.

He looked into my eyes for full a minute ere he spoke again.

“What time do ye go to bed?” he asked.

“Half past ten, sir.”

“The devil ye do! And what time do ye get up?”

“Half past six, sir.”

“Half past six! D’ye mean to tell me that ye spend eight hours in bed and yet ye look as if ye didn’t spend six?”

“Yes, sir.”

Whereupon he made a note on his memorandum pad and without another word went out of the room.

I didn’t dare to paint the next day for when I rose at half past five, I heard a stealthy footstep going down the corridor and a very gentle rattle of the handle of the reception room door.

When at last I plucked up courage to con-

tinue my labours I painted with the window open.

One Wednesday morning in mid July when I was busy painting in a fever, thinking only of my work, I fancied there was something strange and unusual in the air — a formless evanescent and intangible presence took a hold upon my heartstrings and set them all vibrating, as if a chord of music had broke loose from out a Heavenly lute and found the answering chord within my breast.

There was not a vestige of a sound, not even a breath nor yet a heart beat as I stopped for an instant and listened most intently, so I set to my work again and as I painted there it was once more, like the passage of electric fluid through the air, and it thrilled me so that I stopped again and very slowly and cautiously turned about.

And then I jumped off my seat, and my paints and palette clattered to the ground, for I gazed straight into the limpid depths of my little lady's glorious violet eyes!

## CHAPTER X

### A SUNSET AND THE DAWN

“PRINCESS IDA!” I gasped, contemplating in a tumult of emotion the soft young cheeks and glorious chestnut hair.

“Why! Why! It’s Prince Arthur! Oh how lovely!” she cried, cuddling herself with such enjoyment that I envied her the privilege.

“Why,” I asked, puzzled more than I had ever been before, “how on earth did *you* get here?”

“Father sent me in to spy on you,” she replied, “because he says you’re much too artful for him and always hear him coming. But you couldn’t hear me, could you? I’m not so big and heavy as he is, am I?”

“Your father?” I asked, in dull despairing horror.

“Yes, Doctor Redcar. Isn’t he a dear?”

“He your father!”

“Of course he is. Why? Didn’t you know?”

“M-miss,” I said, with lowered eyes, “I’m very sorry. Forgive me for the liberty.”

“The liberty?”

"I — I called you Princess Ida, Miss."

"Well, what of it? I gave you my permission."

"But, Miss," I stammered, "I — I wasn't your father's servant then."

"I'm going to tell him all about it," she asserted, mischievously.

"D-do you think he will mind, Miss?" I asked, a bitter coldness gripping at my heart.

"Mind!" she replied, frowning most ferociously and wagging her little finger at me. "He'll be most *awfully* cross and I wouldn't be surprised if he turned you out this *very* day."

"Oh, Miss!" was all I could ejaculate, and I looked at her with appealing eyes while she turned her back upon me and stalked majestically to the door.

Oh! the dread and apprehension that I felt as I stood awaiting the dreaded verdict. Was I such a felon after all that even she must turn on me as she had done in righteous indignation? Was it so much, this creeping down o' mornings to find a little outlet for my cravings, that I must bear the pains of banishment because of it?

Why had I not listened to Mrs. Pond who spoke from hard experience and been content to labour at my useful work and let this cruel vixen Art alone!

It must have been a quarter of an hour that I

stood thus before the pleasant maid came in and spoke to me.

“James,” she said, “the doctor wants you in his study *at once*, and you’re to bring all your things with you; ‘everything,’ he said.”

The doctor was sitting at his desk fully dressed, looking very serious and judicial, while Princess Ida had her back to me and gazed out of the window.

“Stand there,” demanded Doctor Redcar, pointing to the centre of the room before his desk.

I did so without a word, hanging my head.

“Give me those things,” he thundered, in an awful voice.

So I handed him my paints and picture, and looking to the ceiling now, for I feared to meet his eye, I saw that on its painted surface above my head were the twin fingers of Fame and Fortune, the one with laurel circlet lightly poised in outstretched fingers, and the other with her cornucopia overflowing as if the luscious fruit would fall about my ears.

He looked at my picture for a minute, then laid it on his desk beside the paints.

“James,” he said, very slow and distinct, “so I’ve found ye out.”

I nodded and hung my head again.

“I suppose ye quite understand that ye can no longer remain in my service?” he asked.

“I s’pose so, sir.”

“Ye s’pose so! D’ye mane to tell me that ye s’pose it’s the right sort of behaviour for ye to go creeping round the house like a thief in the night, making copies of my most valued pictures and stinkin’ the plaace out with paaint? Tell me that,” he roared.

“I s’pose not, sir.”

“D’ye mane to tell me that ye think I can keep a boy in my employ who isn’t satisfied with the work he has to do, but that he must get up early and paaint pictures like an angel? Tell me that?”

“Like a what, sir?” I asked, in great surprise.

“Don’t answer me back!” he thundered. “D’ye mane to tell me that ye s’pose I can retain a bye in me service who goes and saves me daughter’s life and never says a word about it?” and he wrote upon his pad while I stared at him too dumfounded to utter a word.

“The insect is not an insect after all. He has changed his skin and is a very brave and modest little gentleman.”

Then rising suddenly all abeam with smiles and with just a hint of moisture in his eye, he put out his hand.

“Jimmy,” he said, “give me your hand. I’m proud of ye.”

Whereupon my little lady turned around and jumping up and down like a fairy on springs,

clapped her little hands while the sanctuary of science rang with her peals of happy laughter.

I was inarticulate with pleasure and surprise, especially as I saw on his desk a picture of a sunset in a little struttet frame.

“What are ye staring at, Jimmy?” he demanded.

“That,” I answered, pointing to the picture.

“Thaat! What of it? What do ye know about that?”

“I did it, sir,” I answered quietly, gazing up into his face.

“D’ye mane to tell me that ye did that?”

“Yes, sir, and when I went back to look for it it was gone.”

At this he took me by the shoulders and leading me to the window gazed intently in my eyes.

“Jimmy,” he said, shaking his head, “I caught ye lying once — about the paaint, now by the saints ye won’t be lying to me again. Tell me, what is it a picture of?”

“The sun going down behind Fenbourne Abbey,” I answered.

“How far from the Abbey was that paainted?”

“About three miles, sir, on the main road.”

“An’ when did ye do it?”

“Last August, sir.”

“The devil ye did. How did ye come to lose it?”

"Why, sir, I was taking it off my pad when a tramp tried to steal my bicycle, so I ran after him and must have dropped it."

"Did ye stand by the hedge to let a motor pass?"

"Yes, sir," I responded eagerly, "a red one."

"Right ye are," he said, delighted. "I always have me cyars paainted red because of me name. An' now then — what did you have in yer hand?"

"A toy pistol, sir."

He went over to his desk and turning back the pages of his memorandum pad ran his pen through something there.

"What are you scratching out, Daddy?" asked my little lady.

"I've got down here that the insect is a liar, on account of the paaint," he responded, then turning to me, "I beg yer pardon, Jim," he said, "ye're not a liar, ye're only a timorous genius."

And then my little lady must needs come straight to me and laying her little hand upon my arm hold out for my inspection in her outstretched palm the broken remnants of my toy.

"You see I told him *all* about it," she said, triumphantly.

"I'll bet you never told him all," I retorted.

"Everything," she answered, finally.

"And how I kissed you?" I asked, looking at her askance.

Whereat she gave a little squeal and ran away and hid her face, while her father's ringing laughter nearly shook the massive books from off their shelves.

"Ah! come on out of that, ye little devil," he roared. "She never said a word of that!"

Well, the upshot of it all was that because of my industry in copying the Tintoretto, and because of my bravery in saving his daughter, and because of my native ability as illustrated in the sunset, and because I was a good, industrious, quiet, intelligent and tactful boy, he decided he was going to take me under his protection, send me as pupil to the most famous artist in the land and give me the chance that such a lad as I should have by right — because he knew I would repay him — and here was his hand and his blessing.

After which he made me go and take off my livery and, putting on my tweeds, he, my little lady and myself sat down to breakfast in the gymnasium and the pleasant maid waited upon us; so that I was silent for reason that I was intensely happy, intensely thankful, and most intensely humble.

BOOK III  
MAKING A NAME



## CHAPTER I

### A NEW LIFE

THE Doctor's plans for me were that I should return as a boarder to Alec's house and occupy the rooms left vacant by Bardilow, now a full-fledged M.D. My time I was to devote to the study of Art.

I had finished the Tintoretto copy by now and it hung in the reception room, framed like the original which the Doctor had carried off to his study and placed in a dark recess so as to the better preserve its freshness. Seeing him so kindly disposed I was moved to unburden my heart, telling him the tale of that dark old tragedy and of the mystery that hung about my birth. He shook his head over the tale.

"Sturgess you never were, Jim. Unclassified you came to me and unclassified you must remain until you make a name for yourself. And then I want you to take my own and be Jim Redcar."

He held out his hand and gratefully I put mine into it.

One Wednesday night the doctor gave a feast in my honour and at the board sat the two greatest artists in the profession. One was Justus Vander-

docken, a painter renowned for the brilliance and purity of his drawing, the haunting sweetness of his colouring and his wonderful decorative composition. The other was Dicky Day, the cleverest penman of his time, whose scintillating humour radiated from the pages of all the humorous journals.

“Give the youngster his fling,” said Dicky. “Let him draw whatever he wants to. Don’t tie his hands with hide-bound conventions, and he’ll make pots of money.”

Vanderdocken frowned, as he answered with a snort.

“Hoh! dere is somding else petter for an artis dan de volgar maging off money, and dat is devoding off his life to de peautiful.”

“He can do both,” snapped Dicky Day.

“Nod if he schdards out mid de maging off money for his objied,” retorted the other, quickly.

“I don’t agree,” answered Dicky stubbornly. “If he has the idea of eventually making money always before his eyes why then he’ll confine himself to ‘selling ideas.’ ”

“A peautiful gomposition worked solely for de lofe of peauty can pe a petter seller dan a gomposition dat is worked solely for its selling proper-ties.”

“But he must be governed by the market.”

“Der marget! Dot is de curse of Enklisch

Ard. Iff de Enklisch ardisds had not von eye on de marget dey vould haf poth on dere ard, and poth de ard and de marget vould pe all de better for id."

"You don't understand what I'm driving at. Here's a youngster full of promise, with great ideas, vivid imagination and strong originality, born into the twentieth century, and what I say is — let that originality find its outlet in its environment."

"Vat? You vould not deach him?"

"Certainly not, let him develop on his own lines. What is more beautiful than a wild rose?"

"A drained von."

"You mean an artificial one."

"No, I do nod. I mean a berfected von."

And so they went at it hammer and tongs, to the great amusement of Doctor Redcar.

"Gentlemen," the doctor cried, radiantly, "there's a set of gloves in the gymnasium which I think will settle the argument wan way or the other, and I should be pleased indeed to referee ye; if Jim here will hould the watch."

My sunset was exhibited with much pride by Doctor Redcar and was very warmly praised and commented on by both, and when they had inspected the Tintoretto and neither could tell the original, their staggering amazement was such that the glow of pride engendered within my heart will

never cool till that same heart is cold in death.

It really was my Tintoretto that decided my future, for after due and deliberate discussion in which the pros and cons were carefully weighed, the doctor decided to place me under the guiding eye and hand of Justus Vanderdocken.

Justus Vanderdocken, having guffed the fish, decided that the first thing to do with it was to send it to art school for a short period, so that it might get a little necessary grounding in the primal laws of drawing and anatomy, in which he judged — greatly to my surprise — that I was weak.

I was placed under the watchful care of a qualified art class teacher by the name of Flora Graham, a willowy lady with a figure like a tube of paint, æsthetic ideas in the matter of hair dressing, a thoughtful brow, receding chin and soulful eyes. She had a way of looking at me with head cast down and eyes cast up while she drivelled gushingly on temperament, environment, platonic attachment and the sexlessness of soul, which irritated me so much that often I was almost rude to her.

One day she spoke of Morris and Rosetti, so I warmed a bit and told her of Miss Purvis and her aspirations, whereat she expressed a great surprise that I should know her and told me that she was an old and very dear school fellow of her own that she had not seen for years. I took her home to

tea with me one evening, and although Miss Purvis confessed to having quite forgotten her, they got on very well together, and sat and talked away while I watched and listened, smoking a cigarette.

“Don’t you *love* Hammersmith?” asked Miss Purvis.

The other’s lips curled slightly at this; but she looked at her companion with her eyes cast up, and there was a wonderful depth of feeling in her voice.

“Isn’t it artistic?” she gushed.

“So natural, so full of quaint suggestion and picturesque associations.”

“But the people?”

“Yes, the people! How I love the people! One gets down to the real first cause of things by mingling with the throng.”

“But isn’t their sordidness just a little — well, hard to bear?”

“One can overlook the sordid surroundings when one has eyes solely for the soul of a community.”

Then came a pause while each looked into space, Miss Purvis lost in ecstatic contemplation, the other weighing her up from the corners of her large and colourless eyes.

“Yes, we are all one family,” Miss Purvis remarked, “working to one great end, that is the true meaning of life. And as to Art, its mission is

to uplift and beautify. If it fails in that mission then is Art a misnomer and a mockery."

I was feeling like a restive horse by now, crossing my legs and uncrossing them, listening to all this cant and verbiage, knowing as I did full well that one but echoed the vapourings of the exiled aliens among whom she spent her life, while the other merely fell into line with her for some purpose too involved for my unravelling. So rising, quietly and unostentatiously, I roamed about the room awhile, and seeing that I was not noticed, crept outside and going down-stairs found solace with old Alec.

He was in the kitchen making up the fire.

"What, tired of your company, my prince?" he inquired.

"Company d'you call it? I'm glad you call it company."

He looked at me with not a little mischief lurking in his eyes.

"How now, my prince, would'st thou forsake thy fair enchantresses in such a boorish manner, leaving them to pine for thy return?" he asked.

"They won't do much pining that I can see," I answered. "I wouldn't mind betting they haven't noticed that I've gone."

"Not noticed that you've gone!" he exclaimed in much surprise. "Are they then so interesting

one to the other that they do not miss you, noble prince?"

"You ought to hear 'em."

"What are they talking about?" he asked.

"Art," I answered with a sneer.

"Why surely that's a subject that should interest you, Jim?" he said, with his brows gone very high.

"I don't know," I answered, feeling very bored. "I like to hear you talk about it, or Doctor Redcar, or Mister Vanderdocken, but it seems such a sloppy, rotten, empty thing the way those women look at it."

"And how is that, Jim?"

"Why, soul and temperament and missions. Oh, let's talk of something useful."

So we talked about the rabbits and the dogs and time passed by so pleasantly that I forgot the ladies up above until the sound of the postman's knock took me up-stairs to see what he had brought.

"Here you are," said Miss Purvis, pleasantly. "Miss Graham tells me that she didn't know you came from Dorset."

"No," I answered, "I don't suppose she did."

"I always thought you were Scotch," broke in Miss Graham.

"The Lord forbid," I answered. "I'm Dorset born and Dorset bred."

“Then you know Ravenhurst?” she flashed.

“Rather!” I exclaimed, completely taken off my guard. “Do you?”

“I’ve never seen it,” she replied, “but I’ve heard about the pictures. Oh, do tell me? Aren’t they very wonderful?”

“I’ve heard they are,” I replied, evasively. “Alec has a brother who is lodgekeeper there and he has seen them and told me about them, but of course I’ve never seen them.”

A few days after I was much surprised to find that Mrs. Pond had a new lodger — Flora Graham!

## CHAPTER II

### FLORA GRAHAM

FLORA GRAHAM was always waiting in the mornings for me to take her to school, and always asked me in the evenings not to go without her as she wouldn't be a minute, so that she was always with me like the poor, and what she saved in tram fares in consequence must have kept her in clothes I should think, for I know that I felt the drain considerably and resented the affliction.

So one morning I very much offended her by going off upon my bicycle and leaving her to find her way alone, and I'm shot if, within a fortnight, she didn't bring home a bicycle herself.

Oh ! she was very artful was Flora Graham, but I hadn't spent my boyhood among ferrets and foxes and weasels and such like things for nothing, and when you try to catch a rabbit it doesn't do to handle the trap too much for they are very quick at smelling out a snare.

One Saturday evening as we were all at tea Alec got a mighty shock, no other than a sudden and unexpected visit from his bountiful brother George, the lodgekeeper from Ravenhurst.

There was a knock at the front door and up

went Alec to see who was there, then there was a mighty lot of exclamation and exuberant surprise and a laugh or two, and then footsteps coming down the stairs, so that Mrs. Pond was all of a flutter for fear her hair was not as nice as it should be.

Flora Graham put on an abstracted and artistic air as she watched me out of the corners of her soulful eyes, for I had heard the voice and, recognising it, felt myself go pale for fear as to what his greeting might be.

So presently here they were within the doorway, Alec, all bustle and importance, leading the way.

“My dear,” he said, “here’s George.”

His wife got up most graciously and greeted her husband’s brother cordially.

“Why, George, this *is* a surprise.”

“Ah,” said George, in heavy banter, “I thought I’d catch you napping.”

Then as he was about to be presented to the ladies what must he do but fix his roving eyes on me.

“Why, who is this?” he cried.

“Why you know him, of course,” said Alec, like the proud but blundering old fool he was, “it’s young Jim.”

“Jim Sturgess, from the Goat and Compasses? Well I never!” and he held his hand out somewhat ungraciously for me to shake.

"Ever heard what became of your father?" he demanded.

"No," I answered, frowning.

"Ah! awful business that was, awful business. I see there's a big reward out for him. A hundred pounds. More than he's worth. And the same for that other scoundrel, Beppo."

Alec asked his brother hurriedly if he wouldn't like to wash his hands, and getting an affirmative answer they went outside again, leaving Mrs. Pond, looking fit to cry, Miss Purvis with a face of stone, and Flora Graham resting her chin upon her hands, watching me in the mirror opposite.

When those two came back again I could see that Alec had been talking to his brother, and when George spoke to me again I was very grateful.

"Do you know, Mister Prince, I mistook you for a young fellow who used to live down in the village at home, and who disappeared some time ago when his mother was —"

"Ah," I broke in, hurriedly, "I wondered why you called me Sturgess."

"But now you see him in a better light he's not a bit like him, is he, George?" asked Alec, anxiously.

"Well, I won't go so far as to say that," replied the other, stubbornly, "but all the same it isn't him."

“Did I understand you come from Ravenhurst, Mister Pond?” Flora Graham asked, in a languid and superior drawl.

“Yes, Miss, that’s my home.”

“How is her ladyship?”

“Not at all well, lately, Miss. She’s come up to Grosvenor Square to see a specialist. She’s going all to pieces lately.”

“Really! Are you staying with her?”

“No, Miss, I’ve only come up for a week and I’m going to stop here if Alec can find room for me. Do you know her then?”

“Oh no, but Father was a *very* intimate friend of Sir Edward Lorrilow twenty years ago.”

“Was he, Miss? That don’t say much for your father, does it?”

She drew herself up, haughtily.

“I said he *was*, not *is*. Father is a barrister and he and Sir Edward Lorrilow were at Oxford together.”

Then Mrs. Pond and Alec had a turn with him and talked of generalities and personalities, Flora Graham I could see, hardly able to contain herself because of something else she wanted to say to him. She jumped at the first opening.

“Aren’t the pictures at Ravenhurst *very* wonderful, Mister Pond?” she remarked, casting her fly.

“They say so but I don’t know much about

them. Ask him," and he nodded over to me.

"Are you quite sure you are not mixing me up with that other fellow again?" I asked, looking at him very straight.

"Why, hang it, of course I am!" he responded, scratching his head in his vexation.

George Pond stayed with us the whole week through with Flora Graham always in attendance, clinging to him like ivy to an oak, but I didn't pay much attention, for by that night's post there came a letter from Doctor Redcar telling me that little Princess Ida was coming up to London to make her home at the pleasant house near Cavendish Square.

So, begging Wednesday off, I asked the doctor to let me take his daughter to the National Gallery and show her the pictures, and when Wednesday came I had her to myself the whole day through, and though I'd spent many a happy hour in those great galleries filling my heart with the wonder of the things therein contained, it seemed a very barren place to me this day because my heart was full to overflowing with the glory of the living marvel that prattled at my side.

We lunched at a restaurant in the Strand and then went to Westminster Abbey, and coming back at half past four a motor car was waiting in the road outside the house; and as we neared the door, behold, there was Lady Lorrilow, very pale and

lined and full of dignity, just coming out, and seeing me she needs must give a start and placing her hand where, in an ordinary person, the heart is supposed to be, staggered back against the wall so that the doctor had to come from his consulting room and use his mighty skill on her to bring her to.

Later in the evening when his work was done, we spoke about her and I asked him if he knew what made her act like that.

“She said she’d seen a ghorst. I’m thinking it’s her braain and not her nerves that’s in need of patching up.”

## CHAPTER III

### A DAY OF SIGHTSEEING

ON Wednesday when I met Princess Ida at the steps of the National Gallery I saw something in the violet depths of her glorious eyes that played sad havoc with the shrine of Art within my breast, something wonderfully sweet and tender yet powerful withal, so powerful indeed that it came on me like a violent hurricane and catching up the Goddess Art cast her down, as if enraged to find her there.

So I hunted up that bit of ribbon which she gave me so many months ago, and sitting up at night so that I could feel quite sure that no one could spy on me, I made myself a little bag of oiled silk and, attaching a tape at either corner, wore it ever after on my heart. I had it on Saturday when she and I were to meet Bardilow at Waterloo and catch the train that took us into Richmond nine o'clock in the morning.

Bardilow was late, of course, and we had an awful scramble to get aboard the train, but we started without mishap, Bardilow picking up Princess Ida as the train was on the move and putting her bodily into the carriage, an attention I didn't

much appreciate as I felt that such was my undoubted right. For though I liked him very much and he was a very charming fellow, most considerate and kind and every inch a gentleman except for his weakness, and I owed it to his thoughtfulness entirely that all these latter days were so full of sunshine for me, yet somehow I wished that he had not come. However, by the time we got to Richmond I had conquered my ill humour and was as bright and joyous as the other two.

That gaunt and silent spectre of a dead and gone posterity, The Star and Garter, frowned upon us with a disapproving eye as we went into the pretty gardens at its foot to gaze upon the view, about whose beauties and enchantment Bardilow waxed eloquent, pointing out the lovely silver stream winding away from the riot of foliage of Petersham below us till lost in haunting vapours, indefinite and tantalising, far away upon our left. But I heard none of it, for in order that we might both benefit equally by his description he needs must come between my sweet Princess and me; and all I saw and all that I could hear, was my own heart pounding on my ribs.

Princess Ida's violet eyes were very soft with pleasure as she listened to his rhapsodies. That is, they were whenever I could see them which was not as often as I could have wished, for every time I looked her way, behold, I had to strain my

eyes around the person of the man who'd come between. And so he stood between my heart's delight and me and prattled on about his silly view, until I thought within myself that this same view were poor and overrated beside a vision that I conjured up of a little winding lane, verdant and flower bedecked, down which a little fairy sped, who didn't dare to look backward because I had kissed her.

So I swore a solemn oath within myself that before this very day were dead, if I got the chance, I'd do it again and again, and yet again.

We chased a rabbit here and there and frolicked with the deer, and Bardilow, glancing at his watch while yet we were in sight of the gleaming walls of White Lodge, was taken with an inspiration.

"Come on, kids," he said all of a sudden, "there's a steamboat leaving here at twelve o'clock that'll take us on to Hampton Court in time for lunch."

So back we went again, out through the gates and down to the river where, by the foot of the bridge, we waited for the Hampton boat — with Princess Ida always in the middle.

And presently we three were on the steamboat's deck, Bardilow standing in the bows, laughing and shouting like a schoolboy in pure delight, and beating time as a band of four strummed out the sorrows of a man who yearned for Alice.

“Alice!” I sneered, within my joyous heart, “who cares where Alice is so long as Princess Ida is at my side with no one in between!”

On looking back upon that most delightful excursion I am moved to remark that the person who invented the truism “love is blind” knew what he was talking about, for though the reaches between Richmond and Hampton Court are full of charm and beauty I can recall nothing of what I saw except the fact that my little lady’s eyes were violet, and her glorious hair a chestnut brown.

However, we eventually landed and soon were at the Palace, and Bardilow, finding a hotel beyond the gates, suggested that we two see the maze while he interviewed the landlord and made arrangements for our lunch.

And then the spirit of romance took a hold upon my sweet Princess, so that turning to me with shining eyes she clapped her little hands together and fairly danced with glee.

“Jim,” she said, “let us play that I am Princess Ida imprisoned by a dreadful ogre in his castle, and you are Prince Arthur come to search for her and rescue her. Won’t that be lovely?”

“Rather,” I replied, delighted. “How do you play it?”

“Why, like this to be sure,” and darting through an opening in the hedge she disappeared into the maze.

I stood for a instant too surprised to move, then ran through the opening after her.

The hedge went either way, with a turning to the left and another to the right, so after a momentary pause I went to the left and peered around the bend. Not seeing her I retraced my steps and peered again around the other to the right.

“Princess Ida!” I called.

“Prince Arthur!” came her voice behind me to the right.

“Where?” I asked.

“Why here to be sure,” was her reply.

So off I went again and once I heard her little feet the other side of the hedge, and feeling certain I had caught her, I crouched low till I came to a bend which I darted round as noisily as I could.

“Ha! I’ve got you!” I cried.

But she wasn’t there, at which I began to feel a trifle vexed.

“Where are you, Princess Ida?” I cried, anxiously.

“Who is it calls?” came her voice, so close that I turned round on the instant certain she was there behind me.

But no, nothing but that aggravating hedge.

“Prince Arthur calls,” I answered.

“And what does Prince Arthur want?” she said, with a deep and terrifying growl, pretending to be the ogre.

“He’s come to rescue Princess Ida,” I replied, wishing heartily that the game was over.

“Can’t you see me?”

I looked around and peered between the leaves most anxiously, but not a sign of her could I see anywhere.

“Look up,” she commanded.

I looked up and saw nothing but the sky.

“No,” came her sweet voice again, “go over to the other side, and then look up.”

So following instructions I turned about and looked, and there she was on a little wooden platform up above my head laughing down upon me. I quickly climbed the wooden steps and took her in my arms.

“Saved,” I cried, “the Prince has saved his sweet Princess from the frowning ogre’s keep. And now,” I continued, with heart aflutter, “Prince Arthur claims his just reward for rescuing you from that dreadful ogre whose awful voice I heard just now.”

On hearing which she hung her pretty head and blushed most winsomely, then lifting up her lovely eyes looked shyly into mine.

“Ida, dear, do you love me?”

She was silent in my embrace, throwing her little head back upon my shoulder with her pretty lips pressed up and eyes tight shut, and the man who could resist it never yet was born!

Bardilow was waiting for us just inside the porch with his face a little flushed, as were our own, and eyes bright and sparkling.

"Come on, kids," he said, "you're looking famished," at which he winked most solemnly at me.

I had thought that sending us into the maze as he had done was just a blind to get us out of the way while he prepared a surprise for us in the matter of refreshment, but the lunch was just an ordinary one. Moreover, he protested that he wasn't hungry, and though his spirits were uneven so that sometimes he was very jolly while at others he was wrapped in mortal gloom, he tasted nothing until the dessert came when, toying with a pear, he laid it suddenly on his plate and got up and left the table.

"Whatever is the matter with him?" asked Princess Ida.

"Haven't the faintest idea," I answered.

However, I was in enough anxiety to beg my little lady to excuse me while I went in search of him.

The waiter seeing me go out came after me.

"You'll find him in the billiard room, sir," he whispered.

"You don't mean to say he's —"

I paused, anger surging hot within my breast.

"Been agoing of it, sir. He's pretty bad."

So into the billiard room I bounced and there he was, lying on a settee with a glass of brandy on the little table at his side.

“ You beast! ” I whispered, hoarsely, as picking up the glass I dashed it to the ground.

“ Alright, Jim, ” he answered, sleepily. “ Sorry old chap. Take her on the river for a bit. I’ll be berrer by and by.”

“ Why did you do it? ” I asked him, savagely. “ What do you want to spoil our day like this for? ”

“ I couldn’t bear to see you, Jim, so young and fresh and — You are happy, Jim old chap, aren’t you? ”

“ I was, till now, ” I answered, gloomily.

“ Don’t you ever touch it, there’s a good chap. Go back to her, old boy.”

And going back to my little lady I told her that our host was sick because of the smell of the engines on the steamboat, and that he would be better if left alone for a bit.

So hiring a boat from the boathouse, we made for the overhanging willows near the bank to throw biscuit to the swans.

It was about this time that I slipped my hand inside my waistcoat and taking out the little bag of oiled silk dangled its contents before her eyes.

“ Jim, you are a dear, ” she whispered.

And so I kissed her again.

"Ida," I said, after a while, "there's something I've been thinking about that worries me."

"And what is that, my Prince?"

"Why, what your father said about some day taking his name."

"Well! Isn't it a good name?"

"None better," I replied, "but if some day you marry me you'll want to change it, won't you?"

"Silly, to be sure I will. I never thought of that."

"Then how can you change it, if mine's the same as yours," I asked, triumphantly.

"But you have your own."

"That is dead."

"Well, Prince is a good name."

"Come, guess again," I entreated.

"What you want," she said, punctuating her sentences with her little forefinger upon my arm, "is a name that will tell people something about you, how brave you are and clever, and — and dear."

"I've got it," I cried of a sudden. "Grubb!"

"But that's a horrid name."

"It's one that tells people who and what I am, for a grub is an insect that is going to be something better!"

## CHAPTER IV

### THE DOCTOR PASSES SENTENCE

DOCTOR REDCAR was surprised that Bardilow was not with us on our return, and when my little lady had retired to her room I told him that our host being overcome by the fumes from the engine room of the steamboat had been obliged to leave us early.

“Fumes from the engine room, the blagyard!” he remarked. “Ye’ve got a pretty humour, Jim. Did he say what the fuel was that caused the fumes?”

But having nothing to add I merely grinned a little sheepishly and lit myself a cigarette.

Presently it came to pass that, Justus Vanderdocken judging me ripe enough to be pinned against the wall, I left the pleasant Art School, much to Flora Graham’s sorrow, and took upon my shoulders the task of mastering the very advanced technique in which he was so paramount and peerless.

I found him a very able, very conscientious, but very irritable teacher; and the way he stormed at me on one occasion because I dared to criticise

his methods, was such that ever after I kept my own opinions to myself.

“Vat!” he roared, with his great long brushes which were nearly a yard from tip to bristles beating a tattoo upon the air. “You tare to schtand up dere and legture to me, you inzolend gnceited buppy! I vill nod haff sudch dalk vrom you! Me, a member off de Royal Agademy to haff to lizzen to sudch dalk as dad vrom a pit off a poy vrom de Ard Schoools! I vill pud you oud upon de shreed if you talk like dat ad me!”

But Art resenting deeply the usurpation of her throne within my breast and being sorely discontented with her quarters in the attic, sulked and refused to be wooed by such a fickle, faithless wight as I, so that stagnation settled on my studies and, spite of all Justus Vanderdocken’s storming and wheedling and raging and cajoling, I was always distraught and preoccupied, living over again my sweet adventure in the maze and longing for the evenings when I could go and dream away the time with Princess Ida.

After a few months the dear old doctor took me by the arm, and led me up to his study.

“Jim,” he said, “ye are not progressing quite as fast as Mister Vanderdocken thinks ye ought. Can ye tell me how’s that?”

“No,” I answered, “unless it is I can’t agree with all his methods.”

"Ah, come out o' that," he replied, a little crossly. "It isn't fitting for a bye like you to criticise the methods of yer master. Ye're there to learn, not criticise."

"But I can't help forming opinions," I persisted.

"Opinions, Jim," and he wagged his finger at me, "are the outcome of the reasoned judgment of mature and practical minds, not the spontaneous conclusions of undeveloped intellects."

"Yes, sir," was all that I could say.

"Now Mister Vanderdocken has formed an opinion and I have formed an opinion, and both our opinions being the outcome of our reasoned judgments are consequently the same, and the opinion on which we are both agreed is that you must go to Italy."

"To Italy!" I gasped.

"To Italy, Jim. He is going to Italy and will very likely stay there four or five years, and we think it will be best for you to go with him. You will then be able to throw off all your old associations, devote yourself entirely to your studies and develop your undoubted genius in its natural and proper atmosphere; moreover, me bye, ye will have nothing to distract your attention there as ye have here."

"But, sir," I protested, staggered by this unexpected bombshell, "I thought I was getting on

very well — and besides — I'm very happy here."

"Ye're much too happy here, that's the trouble, Jim. A happy and contented man never advances. A man who is satisfied with his condition in life never aspires to a higher one. Ye're a bye, Jim, without a name, unclassified as when ye first came here and punched me on the nose, and ye've got to make a name and aspire to something higher than companion to Princess Ida."

He said it so unexpectedly and I was so unprepared for it.

"It's not a bit of good, me bye, trying to maake me think ye're doing yer best," he went on, "because I know better. When Mister Vanderdocken tells me that you are all the time mixing up his colours trying to get a certain tone of violet, and every model that ye paaint from has the same face, it's time to let ye know that that was not the object with which I took an interest in ye. Besides when me daughter comes and taakes yer sunset off me taable here and carries it up to her own room and hangs it on the wall, so as she can see it the first thing when she wakes up, why I think it will be better for the artist to pack ye off to Italy."

"But I can't help it, sir," I protested.

"That's just the point, Jimmy, that's just the point," he answered, kindly. "I would think ye a very hardened sort of wretch if ye could, but ye've got to remember, Jimmy, that Princess Ida

is the daughter of an eminent man, and though I like to see yer bye and girl affection one for the other ye are much too young for that sort of thing. I'll have ye remember, James, that though I've sort of adopted ye, ye are only what ye are as long as it pleases me. I've given ye yer chance because ye saved my daughter's life, and because I think ye've got talent far above the ordinary and that it will paay me to do for ye what I am doing."

"But Italy's so far away, sir, and four years —"

"Will make a man of ye, me bye, and if ye're really fond of her, it will keep ye straight and pure and maake ye worrk all the harder for her sake. I've no intention to force ye, but it's Italy or back to the buttons, so now ye know."

I answered bravely enough, though my heart was dead and cold within my breast.

"If you who have been so kind to me, sir, think it for my good, why then I must submit, and thank you very heartily for the great opportunity you are offering me, and I beg your pardon most sincerely if I have appeared not to be doing my best, but honestly I didn't know it. I promise that I'll do my very best while away to repay you for your kindness and to make you proud of me and — and Princess Ida, too."

He shook my hand most heartily and said that he was pleased with me, and gave me a five pound note to do just as I liked with, and taking him at

his word I told him boldly that I'd spend it on a parting gift for Princess Ida, which made him beam with pleasure.

## CHAPTER V

### ART AND ITALY

So it came to pass that Mister Vanderdocken, the eminent painter, and his pupil, who signed his pictures with a simple, humble "*Jim*," went to reside in the waterways of Venice, where Justus Vanderdocken found the finest masters for me in all the different branches of Art. Anatomy I learned from one, the figure from another, composition from yet a third, while he, like the pilot on the bridge, directed and advised me, and all the time kept a jealous eye upon my originality, abusing me most soundly when I tried to work as he did, not because he resented any encroachment upon his preserves, but because he said that I, like him, must work out my own development. By the time that I was twenty I was hung upon the walls of the Salon, and many were the letters of congratulation I received on my achievement. My little lady sent me one of course, for she wrote every week regularly. Bardilow sent me an amber cigarette tube to commemorate the great event and told me that he was now in his own practice and was much in demand as a surgical consultant. Flora Graham wrote me, too, and told me of her own success

in the miniature room at Burlington House, but as she wrote at least once a fortnight her letters always remained unanswered.

And so I lived and worked and grew and dreamed my dreams with Justus Vanderdocken in a villa on a vine encrusted slope, and I was as contented as a person undergoing banishment can be expected to be, for the longer I was parted from my little lady the fiercer grew my hunger for her.

Justus Vanderdocken, being pleased with me, took me about and introduced me to people who praised my work and fêted me and made much of me; and once he took me to a villa at Chioggia that was rented by an English family and I was presented to Sir Edward Lorrilow and his wife. I saw that his lips were somewhat loose and the expression of his face was petulant; I noticed how white his hands were and how he had a way of cocking up his little finger which brought back vividly to my mind the portrait I had seen of him, as a boy, in the gallery at Ravenhurst; and looking at those fingers I was reminded of a trick that I myself affected when at work, of cocking up my little finger as my brushes sped across the canvas. I thought of a face that looked back at me daily from the mirror as I shaved, and it was very much like this though different.

He looked at me first with languid indifference,

and then he asked Vanderdocken to repeat my name, and Vanderdocken told him that I was the painter whose work was famous for its signature as much as for its brilliance, and that that signature was merely Jim. That I had a little fancy to keep my surname to myself, and though he didn't like fantastic attributes in painters, he had to close his eyes to this as much may be forgiven genius.

So Sir Edward looked at me more closely and his face got somewhat flushed, then paled, and a hunted, tired look came in his eyes, and he asked my age and where I came from and if a tragedy had happened in my family, and the latter question I refused to answer, telling him he must, indeed, forgive me for there are some things in the lives of most of us too personal for conversation. He was very restive all the time that I was there, and drank a little more than was decent while entertaining company; and his wife noticing our strong resemblance remarked upon it.

“Say, Ed’ard, it’s mighty cur’us, but he might be your little brother.”

Sir Edward laughed immoderately on hearing this, then sunk into a gloomy retrospection and sat back in his chair with his hands in his pockets and his head sunk down between his shoulders, and his eyes constantly roving towards me and then away from me whenever I chanced to look at him.

Lady Lorrilow was very keen to see my work, so Justus Vanderdocken invited her and her husband to come to our studio on the following Wednesday, but they never turned up, and when we went over to Chioggia a little later to learn the cause, behold, the villa was deserted and bills were in the windows and a board within the gate.

Princess Ida told me in her letters that her father was anxious for her "coming out," but she had answered that she absolutely refused to come out or go in, or do anything but stay exactly as she was until I was there to see the doing of it.

Her father had talked to her in very much the tone that he had talked to me, so that she had suggested to him that he'd better banish her to Italy as well, at which he had spluttered and fumed in his impotence, and for the first time in their lives they had very nearly had an awful scene until she was inspired to remark that it was either Italy "or back to buttons," which made him laugh, and he had compromised by sending her down to his substantial house in the country. And there she was living and waiting for me, for she loved me more than she ever would have done if we had not been parted, and I must work hard and win undying fame for her sake.

All this time Bardilow had been making rapid progress and his fame was noised abroad all over

Europe as a surgeon whose skill and daring were unsurpassed. I envied him his rooms in Harley Street because they were so near at hand to the pleasant house in the street off Cavendish Square, so I was glad to hear that my little lady was again embowered mid the flowers of her country home.

About that time Justus Vanderdocken told me he was going back to London within a year. He also remarked that I had been a good and conscientious pupil and he was proud to think that he had had a hand in the moulding of a master such as I. I say, "master," because that is the word he used. And had he thought me worthy of a lesser grade he would have put me in it, for he loved the truth above all else, did Justus Vanderdocken. Early winter being now upon us, it being the third week in December and over four years since I'd last seen England or my sweet Princess, I began to think of the London fogs and wondered if they'd started yet, and I yearned with a great longing just to smell their acrid vapours.

Vanderdocken had arranged with the doctor that when October was next upon the calendar, with the summer season over and London once more full, to take the Grafton Gallery and filling it with works of my conception, introduce me to the critics and society; so I stifled my desire for a fog and settled down with might and main upon

the winter's work, knowing that the happy day of my deliverance was less than a year off.

Then a week before Christmas I received two letters, one, my weekly one from Princess Ida telling me she was coming to town to spend the happy festival, and that on Christmas eve the Doctor was giving a party, and how she wished that I could be there too. The other was from Bardilow sending me a copy of Miss Purvis' book which had been published as a season gift, the Lord knew why, for there was nothing seasonable in it; and he talked about my future and his own success and wished me luck and asked for my congratulations; but what made me start up and throw down the gift book with its leaves uncut and storm about the room and chatter in my rage, was a casual remark he made about my little lady. He said that lately he had grown intensely fond of her and meant to put his fortune to the test on Christmas eve and beg her to become Mrs. Bardilow. He asked if I thought he stood an earthly chance.

“Did I think he stood an earthly chance!”  
By all the Saints in Heaven and fiends in Hell  
I'd see to it he did not!

“Did I think he stood an earthly chance!”  
No, I did not, for I'd be there to stop him.

So packing my valise with just a few essentials I burst into the studio where Vanderdocken was

quietly engaged upon a cartoon for a fresco, with his long wooden pipe in his mouth, and told him bluntly that I was going home.

“Going home!” he gasped, glaring at me while his shaggy beard bristled. “You gan nod go home yed. You do nod go from here dill August next. You haf nod yed god your suite gom-plede for de exhibition.”

“Hang the suite,” I answered, “and hang the exhibition! It’ll have to go one short that’s all. I’m going home now, this minute, as soon as I can find a train.”

“But,” he protested, feebly, “your art gomes first, Jim.”

“My art comes last,” I almost shouted. “Too long has art come first. Too long have I been cradled here in art and culture, trusting to my luck and to the loyalty of friends who, when my back is turned, attempt to steal my girl from me. Fool that I was not to see through it all before! Fool to let the bait they held before my greedy eyes blind me to their real intent and purpose. Fool I have been, but thank God, I can do it. There’s a train in half an hour and I’m going to get it. Good-bye.”

“Jim, I brotesdt —” he said, weakly, gasping at the remnants of his crumbling authority.

“Good-bye!” I answered, shortly, with my hand held out.

"But, Jim, vat vill de docdor say?"

"Damn what the doctor will say! It's what I'll say to the doctor that will worry him most. Come, are you going to shake my hand, for I haven't any time to waste?"

Seeing how determined I looked, he shook my hand and also his head as he wished me a pleasant journey.

Oh! the agony of impatience and uncertainty I underwent as I sped across the frontiers! How I fumed and fussed and fidgeted when the customs officers delayed my progress! How I cursed my folly in allowing myself to be thus so foully tricked! How I hated Doctor Redcar for his bullying alternatives. And Bardilow — of all the loathsome things that ever crawled the foulest of them all was Bardilow! He knew that I loved my little lady better far than art, success, or such glittering gewgaws, and yet he needs must so betray my confidence in him as to try to steal her love away from me. Why had I not heeded the omen of the Star and Garter when my heart had told me what my head was far too dense and thick to understand, that he was the evil genius that stood between my love and me?

And she — what could I say or think of her? Perhaps she loved me still as truly as she said she did, and they had prepared this precious Christmas party that together they might lure her into

accepting this man's proposal. This man! This drunkard, this coward, this low and crawling thief who'd wormed his way within her father's heart, and trusted to her love for him to force her to acceptance.

A fog delayed us on the Channel, a fog delayed the train that would have sped across my native land but for its foul and choking interference. And I laughed most bitterly as I recalled how longingly I'd wished to see a fog! But presently we entered Charing Cross, only fifteen minutes before midnight on Christmas Eve.

I dropped my valise at the cloakroom and, calling a cab, urged the man to drive as he had never driven before, and as the clocks were chiming midnight I drew up with a rattle before the door of the pleasant house in the street off Cavendish Square.

I gave the cabman a coin and bolted out across the path, and as I reached the door, behold it opened before me and I fell into the embrace of Princess Ida!

“Daddy, Doctor Bardilow,” she cried, joyously, “the spirit of Christmas has arrived!”

## CHAPTER VI

### A HAPPY CHRISTMAS

I STAGGERED back at my reception, halting and amazed, with all the fight gone out of me as I looked into her face.

But this was not the little lady I had left. To be sure the eyes were just the same, the same sweet, haunting, captivating violet eyes whose depths grew softer as she gazed into my own, the little rosebud of a mouth was recognisable as she smiled in her jubilation and clapped her little hands together as she had done so often in my dreams. But the little girlish figure was no longer there. In its stead there stood a graceful goddess whose symmetry was such that my hands dropped to my side for fear that I should touch her.

Doctor Redcar and Bardilow came beaming at her call, and seeing them, I choked back my reticence, and taking her in my arms kissed her on the mouth defiantly before them both.

“Now,” I said, as I glared with savage eyes on Bardilow, “who’s going to propose to her?”

“Bravo, Jim!” came the doctor’s cheery voice, “bedad I said ye would.”

“Said I would?” I queried, open eyed and mouth agape.

“Sure I said that ye’d come back and slay him if he dared to write to ye like that.”

“But I don’t understand —” I stammered.

Laughingly they took me one on either arm and led me down into the gymnasium while my lady went into the drawing room to entertain her guests.

And the doctor pouring me out a glass of port, with one for Bardilow and another for himself, very solemnly drank a hearty welcome to me.

When that was done he made me stand before him so that he could see how much I’d grown, and felt my arms and weighed me, while I fidgeted and worried him to tell me the reason of all this mystery.

“Now, me bye, I’m not going to praise ye, but it’s very proud of ye I am. Ye have been very faithful to yer contract and Princess Ida, I don’t mind telling ye, has been as good as you, and she begged me to have ye home for Christmas but I reminded her that Vanderdocken had agreed not to let you come until he thought the time was ripe.”

“Yes, but what about Bardilow’s letter?” I broke in.

“Ah! don’t look at him like that! It’s frightening him ye are! Well she began to want ye

very badly, Jim, and Bardilow here said to me that as ye were now such a brilliant artist ye couldn't be induced to leave yer work and that there was nothing ye loved now so much as paainting and ye wouldn't leave it even for Princess Ida. I told him he didn't know ye as well as I did and that ye were a man before ye were an artist, and then he struck the brilliant idea of writing ye that letter — ”

“ Then he didn't mean it? ” I broke in, delightedly.

“ Ah, divil a bit of it he meant at all! It was just to maake ye come and leave Vanderdocken without me breaking me word to him.”

“ Well I'm jiggered,” I answered.

The doctor introduced me to the uncles and the aunts, the cousins and professors, as his boy Jimmy, the boy who'd come to him like a flash of summer lightning out of Heaven to carry on his name and make it lustrous. And as I heard him say it, my heart swelled up within my breast with joy and pride that he was so far pleased with me as to think me now worthy to assume the name that he had promised should be mine when I had earned it.

Oh, that Christmas Eve that welcomed home again the prodigal son!

I can see the drawing room ablaze with candles; I can see my queenly Ida as she sat beside me talk-

ing, oh so breathlessly, of what had passed; I can see myself again with hungry eyes drinking in the glory of her arms, her throat, her hair, her wondrous eyes, the blooming beauty of her fresh young womanhood. And the marvel of it gripped me, held me spellbound, and I felt within my heart a dread unreasoning and an unaccountable bashfulness assailed me.

And then when standing by the grand piano she sang, "When Love Is Kind," I found a further marvel in her voice. The modulated sweetness of it rang within my ears and flooded my yearning heart as with celestial joy. When she had finished she sat beside me once again, and hidden by the fulness of her gown I surreptitiously held her hand, and she let it lie there thrilling my fingers with its warmth and softness.

Now though I'd come hotfoot from Venice just to see my heart's desire and save her from a villain as I imagined, and had thought of nothing else the whole way through but how long it took to get to her, now that I had got her all alone to myself for just ten golden glorious minutes I blushed and stammered like a schoolboy in her presence and hardly dared to look at her, and she was shy as shy could be and those silken lashes of hers kept getting in the way so that her velvet depths peeped out at me most bashfully, like violets half hidden in the grass.

So I fumbled in my bosom and found my little soiled bag of oiled silk, and taking therefrom the ribbon just as fresh as when I had stolen it, dangled it before her.

"Oh, Jimmy!" she said, blushing and smiling most divinely. "You've still got it then?"

"Still got it?" I retorted, hotly. "When that is gone from there you'll know that I have ceased to love you."

"My Prince!" she murmured, happily, and hung her head.

So we talked the matter over seriously and calmly as befitted such sober persons as we had by now become, and agreed between ourselves that I was to ask her father if he would give consent to our engagement, and from that we fell to making plans for the fancy ball on New Year's Eve.

Her costume was quickly settled, Princess Ida she must be and no one else; but mine gave cause for much anxiety and speculation. The same old question that had worried us about my name came up and faced us grimly, it must be something that would tell folks what I was and what I had been, so finally I suggested David Copperfield.

"Oh how lovely!" she exclaimed, ecstatically. "David Copperfield had *just* the sort of boyhood that you have had."

“Had he?” I asked.

“Why, you ought to know that much,” she replied.

“Poor devil,” I answered, feelingly.

Thus it was arranged that David Copperfield would on New Year's Eve, for one night only, be impersonated by no less a person than Jim, the unclassified, the son of sorrow, the insect who had grown to something better and who in the fulness of time aspired to something better and nobler still.

So kissing her in quite a brotherly fashion, I went joyously up-stairs to the Holy of Holies, the doctor's study.

The doctor opened out a drawer beside him and took therefrom some papers and his memorandum pad, and laying them upon his desk addressed me thus:

“Here I have me own analysis of ye, Jim, and Justus Vanderdocken's periodical reports, and there is only wan thing that I want to alter in me estimate of yer character, me bye, and that's the entry I made when ye punched me on the nose. Ye remember that I said ‘he's obedient when it suits him’? Well, I'm going to alter that to ‘obedient whether it suits him or not,’ yet judging by yer conduct when I offered ye the choice between Italy or yer buttons again I must qualify it by saying ‘if proper pressure can be brought to

bear!' But ye were young then, Jimmy, younger than ye are now and somewhat self-opinionated, and Vanderdocken's quarterly report tells me for the past two years that he could not wish for a more intelligent, more obedient, or more modest pupil than you have always shown yourself. Yet he says ye had opinions which ye always kept in the background out of deference to his wider knowledge and experience; but so sure were ye that you were right that ye always brought them up at unexpected times, and they are the outcome of some hereditary influence beyond his power to control. Now when Bardilow wrote that letter to ye and ye came bundling back to-night, as I always thought ye would, it confirmed me in my estimate of ye that, though ye were obedient in matters of the head, in matters that concerned yer heart there was no one to dictate to ye, so I feel bound to alter that entry again so as to make it read 'obedient in matters of the head when proper pressure is brought to bear upon him, but wilful should that pressure be exerted on his affections or his loyalty.' How's that?"

I laughingly agreed with him.

"And now I think the time is ripe to keep my promise to ye and take ye as my son, me bye, and now what d'ye think of that?"

"No, sir, not at any price!" I answered, boldly, looking him squarely in the eye.

"And what the devil's got into yer head now?" he asked, intensely puzzled.

"Why this, sir," I replied, with a twinkle. "It is not fitting, nor decent, neither is it natural, that a son should aspire to marry his father's daughter, as would be the case were you to formally carry out your very kind intention. I'd sooner you consented to let me be your son-in-law."

"Ah, come out of that!" he responded, laughing boisterously. "Ye gave me quite a turn, ye did. Jimmy, when yer exhibition's over and ye've sold as well as I've arranged ye shall, there's nothing in this world would give me greater pleasure."

We shook each other by the hand. There was a lump within my throat, and I saw a trace of moisture in his smiling eyes.

"May I ask her to-morrow?" I stammered, when my voice was under control again.

"Any time ye've a mind to, Jimmy," he replied and turned his back on me. "She's all I've got, me bye, but there's nothing I'd refuse her, nothing at all, as long as it was good for her, and there's nothing better in all this world for a good woman than a good man; but ye must have a name for all that, and ye must be content to be engaged for a year or two, for ye're still much too young for matrimony."

So Jim Redcar I became at that moment as by

the magic touch of a magician's wand, barring the necessary legal formalities which he promised would be carried through without delay.

So getting up I held my hand out to the doctor, wishing him good night and a happy festival.

"Good night," I said, "my father."

"Good night, my son."

Just then I noticed the curtains in the corner that screened the Tintoretto and an impulse seized me to gaze upon the little picture that had meant so much to me. Drawing aside the curtains I looked upon it silently.

The doctor being there I could not do what I was moved to do, that is, kiss it in my thankfulness, so I smiled as I left him, for it was my intention before I went to bed to do the next best thing, and creeping down to the reception room press my lips upon my feeble counterfeit.

So down the stairs I went, oh so quietly, for fear that he should hear me and, turning the handle as silently as my sweet Princess had done on the morning she caught me, I slipped into the room.

A biting blast blew from the open window as, with hand upon the switch, I turned towards the wall at the farther end. A dim light glimmered from an electric torch and showed the silhouetted figure of a man before my copy. The long thin blade of an open knife threw back its brilliance as

it travelled carefully with saw-like movement just inside the frame. Some one had broken in and was cutting out my Tintoretto, thinking it the real one!

My first impulse was to laugh to think that any one should be so fooled, and then a hot rush of anger came upon me because my benefactor and father was being robbed. So crouching low I sprang with all my might upon the thief, and throwing my arms about him pulled his hands down to his sides and pinned them there, then putting my foot beside his heel I hurled him over to the right so that he crashed upon his side and lay there, wiggling and moaning.

“Oh, my God!” he gasped, “it’s stabbed me in the groin.”

“What has?” I enquired, anxiously.

“This cursed knife!” he moaned. “Oh, take it out for God’s sake!”

Letting him go I rushed over to the switch again and flooded the room with light, and as the burglar writhed upon the floor he was not a pleasant object to behold. The knife that he had held within his hand was thrust down deep into his side, and as I bent to draw it out he turned his face towards me.

“Jim!” he uttered, hoarsely, then fainted dead away.

The room swam round and everything went

black for just an instant, then clutching my hands to my cheeks to stop myself from screaming I gazed on the livid face of John Sturgess, my father.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE PASSING OF JOHN STURGESS

UP the stairs I rushed, yet noiselessly for fear of waking Princess Ida, and flung myself within the Holy of Holies, but it was empty; the doctor had gone to bed. Feverishly I groped along the passage till I felt the handle of his bedroom door, which turning I burst in upon him.

“Father! Doctor! For God’s sake come down quick.”

“God in Heaven! What’s the matter, Jim?”

“He’s stabbed,” I panted. “The knife is sticking in his groin!”

“Who’s stabbed? What d’ye mean?”

“My father. He’s down-stairs in the reception-room. Oh, hurry, for God’s sake!”

Without another word he came with me and, finding the intruder just as I had left him, examined him intently.

“Ye did well to leave the knife there, Jim. He’s cut an artery I think. Ring up Bardilow at once, there’s a good bye.”

So flying down to the consulting room I soon was on the wire, and after waiting hours, so it

seemed, the voice of Bardilow came out across the line.

“ Hullo ! ”

“ Is that Bardilow ? ”

“ Bardilow, yes. Who’s that ? ”

“ Jim speaking. Come around for God’s sake ! ”

“ What’s up ? ”

“ I caught a burglar in the reception room and stabbed him. Hurry, there’s a good chap.”

“ A burglar ? Well you’re making a lot of fuss over him.”

“ Oh — Bardilow, for God’s sake don’t waste time. He’s my father and he’s dying ! ”

“ Righto, old chap, I’ll be round at once.”

As I went up-stairs again there was Princess Ida, very white, in a dressing gown, coming along the passage.

“ What is it, Jim ? A thief ? ” she asked in frightened accents.

“ Yes, my dear, and he’s my father,” I responded, dully. “ Oh, do go back to bed, there’s a dear girl. You mustn’t see. I — I stabbed him — by accident,” and I buried my face in my hands.

Folding her soft young arms around me she kissed me very tenderly.

“ Oh ! poor, poor Jim, I am so sorry ! ”

Then because she saw the servants coming she fled back to her room.

In a few moments Bardilow arrived in his swift little car and, patting me upon the back with much sympathy, hurried with me up to the reception room, and soon he and Doctor Redcar were bending over their patient, while I stood by biting my nails in my agitation.

“How did it happen, Jim?” Bardilow asked me, kindly.

I told him.

“Where was the knife?” demanded Doctor Redcar.

So I explained to them as fully as I could all that had befallen.

“Nothing for it, Jim,” Bardilow said, very solemnly. “There’s nothing for it. He’s opened the femoral artery. I can keep him alive for an hour or so, but that’s all.”

“Shall we send him to the hospital?” asked Doctor Redcar.

“He’ll die on the way if you do, and I’ve no doubt Jim would like to have a word with him when he comes to.”

When in the fulness of time he was conscious again the doctor spoke to him very sternly.

“Ye’ve done a nice thing for yerself, me man, and if it’s any consolation to ye to know it, ye haven’t long to live, let me tell ye that. That’s what comes of trying to steal another man’s possessions; but I’ll tell ye this much — it wasn’t the

original ye'd got hold of but a copy, so now ye know ye've brought it on yerself for nothing. Ye've got much upon yer conscience I've no doubt; but ye can confess it to Jim here, because I'm not going to have any complications with the police in this house, let me tell ye that, and when ye're dead, ye'll go round to the mortuary, so hurry up and make the best use of yer time."

After that they left us.

"Jim," Father said, feebly, "come here. Bring me some paper and a pen and ink."

I obeyed him with a heavy heart.

"Now write as I dictate. I, John Sturgess, late owner of the Goat and Compasses near Ravenhurst in Dorset, knowing that I have not long to live, do hereby declare that I have stabbed myself accidentally by falling on my knife while attempting to cut a picture out of a frame belonging to Doctor Redcar with the intention of stealing it. And I, also, confess that six years ago I killed my wife Matilda, with my own hand by stabbing her with a champagne knife."

"You see I didn't mention you, Jim," he said, and his voice was very feeble.

"No," I answered, dully.

"I owe you something for not giving me away at the inquest.

"You knew more than you said, Jim. I could

see that," he continued, after a little while.  
"Where did you get to?"

"I was down in the cellar," I replied, "up among the spirit casks."

He was silent for a long time while I sat there longing for him to die.

"I've had a rotten life since then, Jim. A flash crowd put me on to this — they promised me five pounds if I would do the job — they told me it was worth thousands."

"It isn't worth tuppence," I retorted, with a glow of satisfaction. "I did it myself."

"Where's the real one then?"

"Out of your reach," I replied, shortly.

He was silent and lay there with his eyes closed, breathing very heavily.

"Jim," he said, now very weak, "I dodged 'em fairly smart that night. I shaved myself before I left, and as I went through the woods I came across Beppo's hiding place and there were his old clothes and his knife lying in the mud. So I put 'em on and burned my own things except my coat and hat which I laid upon the bank."

"What about the signs of struggling?" I asked him.

"I rolled about and stamped in the mud before I put his togs on so as to make 'em think he'd done for me, too."

Again he fainted, again I brought him to.

"I did many miles that night, Jim, and peddled buttons and bootlaces for nearly two years."

Another pause.

"And so you knew all about it?" he said, musingly.

"Yes, I saw you."

"You saw me?" and he almost sat up in his astonishment.

"Yes, I saw you washing your hands."

"Good God! I searched all oyer the place for you, Jim."

"I know you did. I heard you."

"That was smart of you, Jim, to open that door and make me think you'd run off."

"I didn't do it to make you think I'd run off. I opened it to see who it was groaning. I thought it was some one outside."

"Thank you, Jim, for screening me."

"I couldn't give my father away, could I?"

His eyes were closed again and his breath came very faintly; but with an effort he opened them and looked intently at me.

"I — I'm not your father, Jim. That's why I killed her — Beppo's letter told me that."

I started up as if I'd had a blow between the eyes and staggered toward him, but he'd fallen off to sleep again.

"If you are not my father, who is?" I

shouted in his ear. "Who is? Who is? For God's sake tell me who he is?"

But he didn't reply, he just lay there and slowly went a dirty grey, while with my ear to his mouth I listened for his breathing.

And then I realised that he was gone, and with him, the secret of my parentage.

## CHAPTER VIII

### HONOUR

I STUMBLED out of the gymnasium and found the doctor and Bardilow in the consulting room.

Without a word I sunk into a chair and, nodding my head in the direction from which I had come, with a gesture full of eloquence, buried my face in my hands.

Then I felt a hand upon my shoulder and the dear old doctor's voice came to me.

"Ah, Jimmy, dear, don't take on about it so. Don't ye be crying, there's a good lad. I can't bear to see ye."

"Cry!" I answered, with a harsh and mocking laugh. "Cry! Not me! This is one of Fortune's little jokes. Haha! haha! ha, ha, ha!"

And I frightened him so with my maniacal laughter that he went to his cabinet and poured me out a draught.

"Take this, me bye, it'll quiet ye. There's a good lad."

"I'm not hysterical," I answered, quiet again. "I'm only trying to be resigned. I never saw the joke till now."

“Come on now, drink it up.”

“Don’t you realise,” I went on, unheeding him, “that this is Christmas Day? A day of peace and joy and happiness, a day when all our sorrows are forgotten —”

While I was talking, of a sudden I was seized in his powerful grip and held helpless with my head thrown back, while Bardilow came in front and forced the fluid down my throat, pinching my nose as if I were a baby. Soon after that a drowsiness crept over me and I knew no more.

I awoke to find myself in bed, my own bed in the doctor’s house that I had not seen for four long weary years, and realising where I was a glow of pleasure flooded my heart and brain so that I turned upon my side and very contentedly went to sleep again, with a scent as of violets and meadowsweet about my nostrils.

When, at last, I was really awake it came upon me suddenly that I had been so for some time, but so sweet and peaceful had been my sleep and so gradual my return to consciousness that I could not tell when and where one ended and the other began; and looking over to the window I saw a fluffy head bent down in shadow over a book.

“Sweetheart,” I cried.

Instantly she dropped the book and rising came quickly over to where I lay, and smoothing back my hair kissed me on the forehead.

I closed my eyes and sighed in my ecstatic joy.

“Do it again,” I entreated.

“Better, dear?” she asked.

“Fine,” I said. “What time is it?”

“Half-past four.”

“Good. Then I’ll get up and be down in time for Christmas dinner after all.”

“Oh no! Jimmy, that was yesterday. This is Boxing Day.”

“What?”

“You’ve slept for over thirty hours, dear. My poor old Jimmy, what a homecoming!”

“Ah!” I said, as memory returned to me. “I think I’ll get up, dearie, if you don’t mind, and will you tell the Guvnor that I’d like to see him as soon as I am dressed?”

So picking up her book and her needlework, she smiled on me very tenderly and left me to myself.

When I was dressed I went straight to the doctor’s study, and the doctor was very tender and considerate.

“It’s glad I am, me bye, to see ye looking so fit,” he said.

“Thanks to you, Doctor, I’m quite alright again,” I answered, and seating myself over by the window, I looked him squarely in the eyes.

“I’ve come, Doctor, to thank you most sincerely for all that you have done for me and say good-bye. After what has happened I can no longer hope to be either your son or your son-in-law.”

“God in Heaven! What has happened then?”

“Why, the other night,” I answered.

“Ah, come out o’ that! Ye told me all about him years ago like the little man you were, when I had ye on the carpet over yer paainting. Ye don’t mean to say ye’ve fallen out with Princess Ida?” he asked me, very anxiously.

“Good Heavens! No,” I answered.

“Have ye asked her yet?”

“I couldn’t bring myself to ask her to go through life with a man of my parentage.”

“Jimmy, if ye hadn’t told us all about him it would be a different thing, but ye did, so there’s an end of it. I took to ye because of yer own qualities not because of what yer parents are or were. They didn’t concern me, and now they’ve both gone clean out of yer life so ye can just go and forget they ever existed.”

“But,” I said, very coolly and quietly, “he’s not my father.”

“What?” he asked, astounded, “not yer father? What the devil are ye talking about?”

“He’s not my father,” I responded, doggedly.

"And how in glory's name did ye find that out?" he queried. "Ye always said he was."

"He told me so."

"Then I'm very glad, indeed, to hear it, Jimmy," he replied, very cordially, "and now ye've got that off yer mind, perhaps, ye'll tell me what it is ye want to say good-bye for?"

"Because he's not my father," I insisted, looking at him fixedly.

He was silent for a time weighing up within himself whether or not I had quite recovered from my shock, and, if not, how far my mind might have become affected by the suddenness and severity of it.

"Oh," I said, "you needn't look as if you thought me mad. Can't you see that even a murderer's son may accept your generosity as long as you know he is a murderer's son? But a son of nobody dare not in honour accept anything."

"Ah, Jimmy, me bye, now don't ye distress yerself about that," he said, very kindly, patting me as was his wont when pleased with me. "We'll find out all about that and put ye right, me bye. It's very fine and manly of ye, Jim, and the right thing to do, but I'm not going to have it, let me tell ye that."

"But don't you see I can't ask Princess Ida until I know?"

"Of course not, Jimmy. Ye're right there. Bedad I never thought of that!"

"And I can't agree to be your son as long as my real father may be a worse and more despicable criminal even than was the other one."

"That's a different matter entirely and ye'll allow me to be the best judge there."

"But all the same I'm going."

"And what for?"

"To find him, sir."

"And what are ye going to do when ye've found him?"

"If he's my legal father I will thrash him and force him to put me right before the world, and if he is not I'll kill him as sure as my name's Jim."

"Ah! don't ye talk in that high falutin' way, Jim. Stop it! Ye're talking like a fool. A lot of good it would do ye to kill him."

"Tell me," I asked him, "which is the better? To go to my death knowing I have avenged my own and my mother's honour, or to live my life with the label of dishonour black across my shield?"

He was very thoughtful for a little while, seemingly at a loss as to how to answer me.

"I shouldn't kill him, Jimmy, no, I shouldn't do that."

"Either my mother has been wronged or fooled

— and perhaps she wasn't even my mother — she never acted like one — but I shall not move another step until I know."

" That's a very noble purpose and resolve, my son, and I commend ye for it; but such a task is not performed without a lot of thought, and ye must lay yer plans out carefully, and work upon them systematically if ye wish to have the slightest hope of success, me bye."

" But, Doctor!"

" Ah, come out o' that! Not so much of yer 'Doctor.' I'm yer father now, me bye. Let me tell ye that."

" But for all you or I may know I'm an outcast, a nameless thing —"

" I'm giving ye a name."

" With no legal standing —"

" I'm giving ye a legal standing."

" Without the common rights of citizenship."

" I'm giving them to ye."

" I can't even inherit what is mine by right."

" But ye can inherit what is mine by will."

" What do you mean?"

" An adopted son can inherit by his adopted father's will what a natural son cannot by nature from his unnatural father."

" But you mustn't do it."

" I have done it."

" Then you must stop it."

“ I can’t, the advertisements will be out before the end of the week. I’ve altered your name, Jimmy, my son, by deed poll, so it’s Redcar you are whether you like it or not.”

Taking his hand within my own I covered it with kisses, while he stroked my hair fondly.

## CHAPTER IX

### ALEC REVEALS MY PAST

THE next day found me rattling the knocker of a hundred and three, Mall Road, and hearing Alec's shuffling step come up the passage in answer thereto, I turned sideways towards the door and pulled my hat low down over my eyes.

"Have you — er — any — er — rooms to let?" I inquired, hoarsely.

"Indeed, sir, I can accommodate you," he answered, standing on one side invitingly.

I walked mincingly past him, while he closed the door behind me and bustled to the room that had been mine four years before, and bidding me to enter, extolled its comforts and convenience.

"Very small — er — isn't it?"

"Small, sir? Small did you say? Why it's the best room in the house."

"Um — er — beastly dark I call it."

"Dark did you say, sir? You call this dark! A fine and airy room, sir, that was once occupied by a famous artist."

"H'm," I answered, "it's very close and stuffy."

"What's that, sir?" he demanded in great indignation.

“Stuffy,” I said. “Close and smelly, beastly smelly, phoo!”

He looked at me in deep dejection with eyes so full of hurt that I thought he was about to cry, so taking off my hat I looked him full in the face and held out my hand.

“Took you in fine, old chap,” I said with triumph. “How are you and how’s the missus?”

He staggered back as if he had been shot, dropping his hands to his sides and craning his head forward with his mouth wide open in his astonishment. Then he fairly jumped across the intervening space and taking my hand in both of his shook it till I thought he’d shake it off.

“Why, Jim!” he almost shouted. “Why it’s Jim! It’s Jim. It’s Prince Arthur!” Then running to the door he called excitedly down the stairs: “Rosamond! Rosamond! He’s come back again!”

“Who’s come back again, *Alexander?*” demanded Mrs. Pond’s somewhat peevish voice.

“The prodigal son, our Jim, our wandering boy.”

Whereupon she gave a little squeal and in a few minutes she, too, was greeting me in my old room.

And when I’d told them all about myself and they had told me all about themselves, and we’d wished each other a happy new year and when

Mrs. Pond had gone off again to get a cup of tea for us, he looked at me with all the pride of ownership.

"It's a proud, proud day, indeed, my Prince, that should bring you here to make my old heart glad with your success."

"Ah, Alec," I said, a little sadly. "I'm not a success. I'm a failure."

"A failure?" he gasped.

"Yes, my father's turned up again."

He looked at me too dumfounded to speak for a little while.

"Alas," he mourned, "that our dead past does ever lie in wait to mar our future! Has the doctor turned you out because of him?"

"Good Lord! no," I replied, stoutly. "He wouldn't do a thing like that. Besides he wasn't my father after all."

"Not your father? John Sturgess not your father? I always said he couldn't be."

"Why?"

"Because a jewel such as you could never find a home within the head of such a toad as he," he replied, with conviction. "But how did he find you out?"

So I told him all about it, and when I had finished he congratulated me most warmly on being so well rid of such a base connection.

"Ah, but don't you see, old chap, how much

happier I would be if he were my father after all?"

"And how can that be, Jim?"

"Because it were better to have even him for a father than not to know whose son I really am."

"Out upon you!" he replied, warmly. "A genius such as you is Heaven born."

I thanked him for his adulation and must confess I found it very comforting, and Mrs. Pond having prepared the tea we went down-stairs to the shabby little dining room.

I looked up at the bird cage and found therein a successor to the old canary.

"You've got another bird I see," I said to Mrs. Pond.

"Yes, Mister Prince," she replied without enthusiasm. "Miss Purvis gave it to me when the other one died, a pedigree bird she said it was; but it's got no voice.— It's a hen."

"Rough luck!" I said, and made a mental note of it. "And how is Miss Purvis?"

"Very well, indeed. She's gone home for Christmas."

"And Miss Graham?"

"She's gone to her people who are in London for the holidays."

When I thought that sufficient time had been spent in such trivialities I asked Alec to come with

me to the doctor and tell him all he knew of my childhood, whereupon he lamented the fact that he was not smart enough as to attire, and spoke with longing of the old top hat and said he'd worn it twenty years and if he hadn't been so reckless with it he might have had it now, as befitting such a ceremonial excursion.

However, Mrs. Pond and I, with the aid of a clothes brush and a needle and thread, trimmed him up and made him look at least presentable.

So presently we stood in the doctor's study, and I presented my early benefactor to my later one.

"It's pleased I am to meet ye, Mister Cannibal," said the doctor, with a twinkle, extending his mighty hand. "Any friend of my son Jim's is a friend of his father."

At hearing which Alec held himself very stiffly.

"A friend of that scoundrel's, did you say? I'd have you know, Doctor, that I was never anything but a patron."

"Ah, come out of that!" the doctor answered. "It's meself I'm talking about, not Sturgess."

Which made poor old Alec fall into such confusion that he fairly cringed.

"I am humiliated, sir," he said. "I am indeed a man cast down to think I so misunderstood your generous intentions, but my name's Pond. For nearly fifty years I've trod the boards and Alex-

ander Hannibal Pond is a name that though it's known misfortunes, has never yet been bracketed with shams."

"Ah, forgive me," said the doctor. "I'm very forgetful of names. That's why I have me cars paainted red so as I shan't forget me own at times. Ye've known our Jimmy here for a good many years?"

"I've watched him bud, I've watched him bloom, and I hope to see the day when I will hold his fruit within my arms," replied Alec, with emotion.

Hearing which the Doctor made a note upon a memorandum pad.

"When did ye first know him?"

"When he was but twelve years old."

"Ye came from Ravenhurst?"

"I have already said so."

The Doctor scribbled on his pad again.

"Did ye know this man Sturgess?"

"Only as the dispenser of refreshment."

"But ye knew Jim well?"

"Ah sir! he was the apple of my eye, he was my companion in my solitude as I in his."

"What made ye take to him?"

"The spark within his soul did call to mine."

"Did ye know his mother?"

"I have seen her and I have spoken to her."

"Is Jim here anything like her?"

"No more than is the silken purse unto the ears of swine."

"Who is he like?"

"Ah, there you have me as in a cloven stick. Never have I gazed upon his like nor ever shall."

"Now that's very nicely put," said the doctor, getting a little impatient, "but it doesn't carry us along very far. What I want to get out of ye is this. Are there any tales about him, any rumours or suspicions down at Ravenhurst or any incidents that ye can call to mind to let a little light upon his parentage?"

Alec looked a little squashed, and fumbled somewhat nervously with his hat.

"There is one thing that has always puzzled me —"

"Ah," said the doctor, eagerly.

"I took him once to see the pictures in the great gallery there and Lady Lorrilow came in and turned him out!"

"Did she now, and what was that for?" asked the doctor, scribbling once more upon his pad.

"I don't know."

"What did she say?"

"She stamped her foot and ordered him out."

"And what did he do?"

"Stood not upon the order of his going, but went right hastily — and I with him."

The doctor laughed in great delight.

"Come, this is more like," he said. "What occasioned the outburst?"

"Ah," mused Alec, shaking his head, "I've lain awake o' nights trying to find the cause of it."

"Tell me just what happened."

"'Twas on a Tuesday afternoon," continued Alec, "the sun was scorching down upon us, the larks were signing overhead, the wind was whispering in the trees when Jim and I set forth to seek adventures in the woods. It was our custom, on Tuesdays when I happened to be at Ravenhurst to sally forth and play at slaying dragons and do the scene from King John where Hubert comes to put out Arthur's eyes," and he smiled at me a little wistfully. "Well, we were walking through the bracken to the woods when Prince Arthur of a sudden broke away from me and went in chase of a hare. After a bit I came upon him locked in mortal grips with an alien bravo."

"Hey! Hey!" interrupted the doctor, "ye never told me that, Jim! Go on."

"An alien bravo of a sable hue," continued Alec, "who threatened him with hurt if he did not at once take him to his mother."

"Good! Good! now we're getting at it," broke in the doctor, his pencil travelling rapidly

across his memorandum pad. "What was he like?"

"Ah," sighed Alec, mournfully, "I would I could tell you, but he tarried not, so full of fear was he on seeing me."

Then I took up the tale. I told him all about Beppo's visits to the house, his weary vigils, his cunning conversation with Bill Blay, the letter, his disappearance, and how later I saw him in the gipsy van. And when I had finished, the doctor pumped old Alec about our visit to the studio and made him say how her ladyship looked and what she said, and questioned him about his brother, so that poor old Alec was near to fainting from being badgered.

"So it was you who first detected Jim's ability, was it?" the doctor demanded.

"That is an honour, sir, I will allow no other man to deprive me of," Alec replied, wrathfully.

Then the doctor asked him all about himself and showed him many of his treasures, including the Tintoretto in its corner above the cupboard, and when he had finished I begged permission to take my dear old friend about the house and show him others.

## CHAPTER X

### THE FOX AND THE GRAPES

THAT same evening I sat at the little writing table in the drawing room going through the "copy" for an advertisement, which the Doctor had arranged should go in every paper in the Kingdom.

"If William Blay, one time coachman to Sir James Lorrilow at Ravenhurst in Dorset," ran the script, "and Beppo, late valet to Sir Edward Lorrilow also of Ravenhurst and later of Chioggia in Italy, will communicate with the undersigned they will hear of something to their advantage. Should this meet the eye of any one who knows the present whereabouts of both or either of the aforementioned William Blay and Beppo, such persons are requested to communicate such whereabouts to the undersigned without delay and they will be suitably rewarded."

The address of Doctor Redcar's lawyers was appended.

I had read it over once and then again and was musing over it profoundly when I was startled to feel my lady's hand upon my shoulder and a straggling chestnut curl tickling my ear.

"What do you find so interesting, Jimmy?"

she asked, playfully, "that you can't hear me speak to you?"

"My darling!" I protested. "Forgive me! I was dreaming, I think."

"Dreaming of the days to come?" she asked, seating herself beside me.

"No," I answered, sadly, "of the days that are past."

Taking up the paper she read it through with her nose a little tilted.

"Who is this Beppo?" she asked, when she had finished.

"Beppo," I answered, "is the tramp who went for me once in the woods at Ravenhurst."

"And what on *earth* do you want to find him for? Is it to have him punished for attacking you?"

"No," I answered, awkwardly, "he — er — he may know something about my father."

"But your father's dead. Why bother about him now?"

"Ah, but don't you see he wasn't my father after all."

"Well then, what do you want to bother your silly old head about him for? Sitting there mumbling and moping and not taking any notice of me when I speak. If he isn't your father, then he isn't."

"Ah, but dear, I want to find out who is."

"Why, you know who is, you silly old Jimmy! Daddy is, of course! How many fathers do you want, for gracious sake?"

"Ah, you sweet little innocent!" I said, looking lovingly into her glorious eyes.

"Well," she answered, with a pout, "I wouldn't bother about a father who had treated me as yours treated you — poor old Jimmy!"

"Well," I remarked after a pause, "he may be able to tell me something about my mother."

"Why," she answered, very much surprised, "whatever can he know about her?"

"I don't know," I answered, plunging deeper in the mire. "They were in service together you know, and — and perhaps she wasn't my mother."

"If I had such aggravating people for parents I wouldn't be bothered with them," she replied. "I think it's a very good job you are certain of one thing at least."

"And what is that, sweetheart?"

"Why, who you are."

"That's just the point. I'm not."

"Not certain who *you* are?"

"No," and I sighed in my perplexity. "If I did know, I'd take you in my arms and kiss you till you couldn't breathe, you tantalising little angel, you, and ask you to be my wife this very minute."

"But you're Jimmy, of course," she answered,

with the love light dancing in her violet eyes.

“Yes, but Jimmy who?”

“Why, Redcar, you silly boy, I don’t care who else you are.”

How could I explain to her? As well try to explain to an angel why we vaccinate a baby! I couldn’t tell her it were better for her not to love me. She would only eat her little heart out in her desolation.

“Play me something, sweet,” I said.

“Very well,” she agreed. “I will on one condition.”

“Yes?”

“Tell me what I said to you a while ago?”

“Said to me? When?”

“When I interrupted your dreams.”

“I’m afraid I can’t, sweetheart,” I answered, guiltily. “What was it?”

She bent down nearer to me so that the fragrance of her hair intoxicated me, and wagged her little forefinger right in my face.

“No, sir. I shall not tell you, neither will I play to you. If you have got a sorrow that you will not let me share, that you’d rather bear yourself, then it’s not a bit of use you ever telling me you love me. You can’t love me unless you trust me.”

“My dear,” I said, despairingly, “it’s no use. I *can’t* tell you. Go and ask your father.”

“Ask Daddy,” she replied, scornfully. “I asked him yesterday.”

“Did you, sweet? And what did he say?”

“Why, he said that *you* were like a toad under a harrow, and that he’d tell me all about it when he’d got the harrow off.”

“He’s got a very happy gift of vivid illustration, has the Guv’nor,” I replied.

“Jimmy,” she said, persuasively, “you’re going to tell me.”

“No, I’m not,” I answered, very decidedly.

“Then you don’t love me, Jimmy?”

“Passionately, my sweet Princess,” I groaned.

“Dear old Jimmy,” she murmured, and laid her pretty head upon my shoulder.

“Who is William Blay?” she asked, after a moment.

“He is an old coachman who knew my mother.”

“Did he know your father, too?”

“He knew John Sturgess; but whether he knew my father or not is what I want to find out.”

“Who do you think you are, Jimmy?”

“I?” I answered, sadly. “I am the fox who wanted the grapes and couldn’t have them because they were always out of reach.”

“Jimmy, dear, the grapes are yours if you only care to ask for them!” she whispered, her glorious eyes very soft and shy.

I gazed down at her in mute astonishment and blank dismay. An awful longing surged within my heart and the hot blood raced into my temples with a sickening beat. I trembled as I looked at her, fighting against the fierce desire to take her at her word.

“Bless you for those words, my darling; but though the grapes are most divinely sweet, I must say no!”

“Oh, why, Jimmy?”

“Because you are without a flaw yourself, spotless and pure, and innocent and undefiled.”

She lifted up her head and gazed at me, puzzled and without understanding, then a light broke on her and she looked a little shocked.

“Do you mean, Jimmy,” she asked, with some concern, “do you mean you — you haven’t been a good boy all your life — or while you were away?”

“No, not that,” I answered, laughing.

“Then *what* do you mean, you tiresome Jimmy?” she continued, pouting.

“Oh, my dear, I mean — Oh, can’t you be content to trust me for a while? Can’t you see, my love, how your persistence is torturing me?”

At once she was distressed, and throwing her pretty arms around my neck laid her little cheek by mine.

“My Jimmy, my poor Jimmy! Jimmy, dear,

I wouldn't have hurt you for the world — but, Jimmy dear, it makes my poor heart so heavy to think that there is something you are suffering that I can't share with you that I — I sit up in my bedroom, dear, and cry and cry, for fear you do not love me."

At hearing which I struck my colours, and because she was so pitiful and so alluring, and I, for all my stilted honour, was merely flesh and blood, I threw my arms around her and with burning face and hot, dry eyes kissed her on the hair and on the cheeks.

"My sweet Princess," I said, when I was calm, "henceforth, until the harrow is removed, I am your brother and have a right to kiss you."

"Of course you have, dear," she answered, happily.

"Well," I said, picking up the copy, "I must take this wretched stuff up to Father and, when I come back, we'll put my past aside and as brother and sister play bezique till bedtime."

And thus, having put my skeleton back into its cupboard, we spent a calm and most delightful evening, and when bedtime came kissed once more as brother and sister have a perfect right to do.

## CHAPTER XI

### PRINCESS IDA'S DEBUT

THE next day, I went with Alec to Covent Garden and together we sought out such a costume as David Copperfield could have worn, at my age, and I stayed with him till evening, because I dreaded seeing my sweet Princess more than was absolutely necessary, and moreover, she was busy with dressmakers and such like folk, making preparations to look her very sweetest at the fancy ball which, on New Year's Eve, would see her "coming out."

I took old Alec to an outfitter's, by the doctor's orders, and fitted him out generally from top to toe and made him look prosperous. And his old heart swelled and his eyes beamed bright to think how smart he'd look so that hope revived and all his old ambitions were reborn. I also purchased for Mrs. Pond a new canary, a cock this time, one guaranteed to sing, and putting it within a bright and roomy cage we took it home and gave it to her; and because she was so pleased to see her husband fitted out so well and looked a little wistful, I suddenly remembered some arrears of rent I owed to her, and when next I saw her she had

done what I hoped she would, and looked very nice, indeed.

Going back to Cavendish Square I bought a paper and found that the Scotch express had played its usual Christmas freak upon its unsuspecting passengers, and running over points at fearful speed had tumbled down an embankment somewhere near Carlisle, and smashed itself to atoms. Among the names of the injured I found that of Lady Lorrilow, the old lady who had turned me out so unexpectedly that day I'd gone to see the pictures. She had smashed her leg above the knee and was lying unconscious at a Nursing Home.

When I got home I found that the dear old doctor had a great surprise for me, none other than a bright, new, gold cased watch with my name engraved thereon, as a belated Christmas present. "Jim Redcar," ran the inscription, "from his father." I thanked him very heartily and prized it very much because, although I was by now a full grown man, this was the first watch I had ever owned.

On New Year's Eve Alec came to help me to dress and a very good job he made of me. He tied my stock and buckled up my trouser straps beneath my insteps so tight that I commiserated David Copperfield that he was fated to appear in such uncomfortable garments. And when that

was all complete I went down-stairs and met my sweet Princess, and never will the memory of my fairy as she then appeared be blotted from my mind! Then the three of us, Princess Ida, Falstaff, for such was the doctor's fancy, and David Copperfield, packed ourselves in the Doctor's car for the long and perilous journey between Cavendish Square and Grosvenor Square.

The party was at Margery's aunt's and surely never had that gracious aunt looked better than now, when, as Marie Antoinette, she stood within the spacious hall welcoming her guests. She had a word to say to all of them, a kiss for Princess Ida and many kindly words to me. Bardilow was there in a suit of shining armour and a stiff panache above the mantlings on his helm, and long before the revelries were half way through I found him seated in the conservatory with his helm upon his knees, holding a piece of ice he had purloined from some champagne pail to his brow, between his mailed hands, and cursing his folly, yet without the strength of mind to go and leave it.

Not being a dancing man I was fain to sit and watch, and I gnawed my lips to see my sweet Princess whirled off by all.

Many of the guests were in evening dress and others came in mask and domino, and there was one, a purple domino, that hovered around much

to my annoyance. Towards early morning I began to find the place a little warm and as I discovered that my sweet Princess was tired with the endless whirl I took her arm in mine and together we slipped into the picture gallery. The walls were filled with portraits of Lorrilows dead and gone, so getting up we strolled about and looked at them.

Suddenly I heard my little lady call in much surprise.

“ Jim,” she cried, pointing at a picture. “ It’s you, the very image of you ! ”

So, joining her, I, too, gazed upon the scion of a noble house, and reading the inscription I saw that it was the father of the man I’d met in Italy, the wondrous painter of the gems I’d seen at Ravenhurst.

“ Jimmy,” she said, “ you’re not David Copperfield at all, but Sir James Lorrilow.”

As I gazed with awful certainty assailing me, there was a rustle and looking round I came face to face with Flora Graham.

“ Why, Jim,” she said, effusively, coming towards me with extended hand, “ *this is a surprise!* ”

“ Well I never ! ” I exclaimed. “ I never thought to see you here, Miss Graham ! ”

“ No,” she answered, casting down her eyes and looking soulful, “ my aunt brought me. When did you come back ? ”

"Christmas Eve," I said, and seeing she did not intend to leave us, there was nothing for it but that I must introduce her to my sweet Princess.

"Miss Redcar," I said, "this is Miss Graham who used to teach me at the Art School."

"Oh, really," answered Princess Ida, bowing just a little stiffly, "I've often heard about you."

"Yes, he was a very good boy then," replied the other. "It's so like him to come to see the pictures. Do you know, Miss Redcar, wherever I am if I can get the opportunity I always make a point of visiting the picture gallery. Art is life to me. This is a wonderful collection," she continued. "There are portraits here by Van Dyck, Holbein, Gainsborough, Kneller, Sir Peter Lely, and there's even one by Blake, I believe."

Her eyes swept around the room until, at last, they rested on the picture which had attracted us.

"Why," she exclaimed, "what an extraordinary resemblance! Did you come as Sir James Lorrilow?"

"No," I answered, somewhat shortly, "David Copperfield."

"Well," she asserted, "I never saw a likeness so remarkable! That might have been painted from you, Jim, even to this curl beside the ear," and she fingered that selfsame curl in a manner that I didn't much appreciate.

“ Miss Graham,” I said, with some embarrassment, “ may I ask a favour? ”

“ Certainly,” she answered.

“ Will you — er — keep this to yourself? ”

“ Keep what, Jim? ”

“ Why, any hint of this — resemblance,” and I pointed to the picture.

“ Certainly, if you wish it — but why? ”

“ I don’t want every one to be coming up to look at it,” I stammered.

We turned to leave the gallery to Flora Graham; but she linked her arm within my little lady’s and praised her dress and made herself altogether so charming and delightful that Princess Ida was quite taken with her, so leaving them together off I went to find the doctor.

He was deep in conversation with a famous author, but taking him aside I begged him come with me into the gallery. When we had reached the spot I took my stand beside the portrait.

“ What do you think of that? ” I demanded.

“ Good God, Jimmy! ” he exclaimed, “ it’s a portrait of yerself! ”

“ Yes,” I answered, grimly.

“ Why, Jimmy boy, then you must be — ”

“ Yes,” I interrupted, “ if ever that man had a grandson I am he. If not, then why did that man Beppo recognise me in the woods? And why did Sir Edward Lorrilow leave his villa in Chiog-

gia in such a hurry if it wasn't that he'd recognised me?"

"Jimmy," said the doctor, excitedly, "ye're on the right track."

"Yes," I replied, "but where does it lead? To honour or disgrace?"

"I should say honour, Jimmy, judging by the way he acted. If it meant disgrace, he wouldn't be afraid to meet ye; but if ye are his rightful son then of course he wouldn't want to see ye again, because honour for you would mean disgrace for him."

"Anyway," I said, "I'm going to find out."

"How, me bye?"

"I'm off back to Italy to-morrow, and I'll search all over Europe till I've located him."

## CHAPTER XII

### I SEEK MY FATHER

THE next morning found me once again upon the train bound for Dover and the Continent, and in the fulness of time I was knocking at the door of Justus Vanderdocken's studio in Venice.

“Gome in,” came the old familiar growl.

So in I went, and there he was putting some finishing touches to the last of a series of Venetian studies that he called my “suite.” He nearly wept in his delight and said that if I'd only told him that all I wanted was a “Christmas” holiday I could have had it and welcome. He was glad to see me back again and hoped I'd settle down to work.

“Work,” I answered, “I haven't come back to work. I'm here to find the whereabouts of Sir Edward Lorrilow as I've got a few things I want to say to him.”

“Bud, Jim, your Zalon picture only wants a touch, and ze Agademy exhibit won't take you a day to vinish.”

“I can't help it,” I said; “I've something more important now to think about. Art and success are a very bad second to happiness.”

He argued with me and stormed at me; but finding neither arguments nor rage of much avail, he tried wheedling and coaxing, and finally appealed to gratitude and reason.

"I've been vorking all de veek ubon your bigture, Jim, to get it vinish for you. I dink you mighdt ad leasdt do choost dat mooch vor me. It vill nod dake you long and you gan gain noding by going to Chioggia, for he is nod dere. You schdop here and vinish oop your vork and den you gan set enquiries on voot quietly, and by de dime you've done you vill know pedder how to schtardt. Isn't it?"

So I gave in and worked feverishly for nearly a fortnight, by which time I learnt that Sir Edward Lorrilow had gone direct to Naples from Chioggia, that his yacht was still there and that he spent the greater part of his time within the bay.

So telling Justus Vanderdocken as much as I thought he ought to know, and satisfying him that I went upon my quest with the doctor's full sanction and connivance, I left my future reputation as far as Art was concerned within his kindly and capable hands, and with heaps of introductions from him and promises of more should I require them, went out across the United Provinces.

I wandered anxiously through the streets of

Naples, hoping that my eyes might alight on Sir Edward or his on me; and once I thought I saw him on a balcony, but when I stopped to look I found it must have been the shadows that deceived me — for there was no one there.

A talkative old fisherman pointed out his yacht, riding at anchor in the moonlight upon the waters of the Bay. It was a long, low craft, all white with just a touch of gold about her lines, and as I looked at it a party got into a boat and rowed out amongst the shipping in the direction of a liner. When I had pumped my garrulous informant dry I went back to my hotel, and dreamt of how I'd lay in wait for him to-morrow and have it out with him, and learn for once and all whether my lot was honour or disgrace. But in the morning when I came down to look for it the yacht was gone and I had missed him.

Gone — I knew not whither. Gone while I had slept. Gone while I lay and dreamt of how I'd force a confession from him. And I cursed within myself that I had not taken boat and followed in the wake of that other that rowed out upon the Bay, for now was I convinced that he to whom I owed existence was of the party. I suspected that 'twas he I'd really seen upon the balcony and no elusive shadow, and that seeing me he had vanished in the night.

I sought out the hotel upon whose balcony I'd

seen him and asked if they could tell me his destination, but they only shook their heads and shrugged their shoulders, and spread abroad their palms and smiled most benignly. They told me that he hadn't stayed there, but had only come occasionally and had a meal or slept a night or two, and then was off again across the Bay to Capri or to Ischia.

Hot upon the scent, I found my fisherman and bargained with him, so that after much of chaffering he agreed to take me in his boat across the Bay, and anywhere I liked so long as I could pay him just enough to keep his family in necessaries. But though we searched the waters high and low and swept them clean from north to south and east and west, no trace of either Sir Edward or his yacht could be found.

Then I bethought me of my letters of introduction and called upon the friends of Justus Vanderdocken, and after many a dreary tea and social function I learned from some one that three weeks ago my quarry had been heard of in Reggio. At that time his intention was to cruise about the straits and probably go to Messina, or Malta, or even stay in Palermo till the spring.

I immediately wrote to Vanderdocken for letters to Reggio, and off I started once again, through Campagna and Calabria right to the very toe of Italy's gigantic boot. At Reggio there was

no sign of him so I crossed the straits and landed at Messina, but he was not there. At Palermo I drew another blank, and though I waited near a week and called on every one and threw out many a fly, my fish was too sharp to rise.

I met a world-famed poet at Palermo, who told me that his wife had heard from relations that Sir Edward Lorrilow was in Malta.

Again I took the boat, and when we were in the neighbourhood of Sicily a snow white yacht with golden lines passed us a mile to starboard, going north. I begged a glass from an officer and scanned her build and rig, and saw upon her bows the well known name, *Ravenhurst*, and stormed and fumed and fell into a deep dejection because my quarry was near and yet so far.

Valetta was a nightmare because I was imprisoned on a rock and every day's delay put miles between us. I was a month upon the island before I heard, quite casually from an officer, that Sir Edward Lorrilow was in Genoa; so I packed up my belongings and went hot foot upon my errand.

At Genoa I found *The Ravenhurst* at anchor almost as soon as I set foot upon the quay, and remembering how procrastination had at Naples been the cause of my undoing, determined to board her without delay.

The gunwale of my boat was just beneath her

golden line when a man came up from down below and hailed me.

"Ahoy, there! Mind the paint!" he shouted, warningly.

"Is this Sir Edward Lorrilow's yacht?" I demanded.

"It are."

"Is he aboard?"

"He aren't."

"Can you tell me where he is?"

"I can't."

"How's that?"

"'Cause I don't know, that's how."

I bit my lip in my vexation and pondered as to how I might the best extract the knowledge that I sought from this unwilling witness.

"Are you expecting him back?" I asked.

"I am."

"When?"

"When the moon turns green," he answered.

"Are you trying to be funny?" I asked him, angrily.

"No," he replied, flippantly.

"It looks very like it," I protested, flushing.

"I don't have to try, it comes natural," he said.

"Now what do you want?"

"I want Sir Edward Lorrilow."

"So do I."

"You do?"

"Yes, I do. We've run out o' bacon, we ain't got no taters and I haven't had a drink since Toosday."

"Then why don't you go ashore and get one?" I asked him, laughing.

"'Cause I've got to stop aboard, that's why. I'm the watch, I am, when I ain't the cook, and when I'm the cook I ain't the watch," and he spat over the side.

"Have you any idea where I could find him?"

"Oh, don't arst me!" he said, disgustedly, "'e's gone on to Mentoney, I think, and arter that 'e's off to Monty Carlo, and if 'e doesn't come aboard to-night we've got to up sail and go to Marselaisy."

"Oh! you mean Marseilles."

"No, I don't mean Ma sails or anybody else sails but us, and we sails for Marselaisy."

"Where's the captain?"

"With the crew."

"And where's the crew?"

"With the captain."

"Well, where's that?"

"Where I oughter be, in some pub or other."

"When do you sail?"

"Full tide."

"What time is that?"

"'Anged if I know. I dropped my watch overboard this morning."

"How did you do that?"

"Leaning over the gunnell looking for me pipe."

"Looking for your pipe?"

"Yes, I dropped it overboard trying to get me cap."

"Where was your cap?"

"In the water o' course, where it had fell."

"Suppose I was to go ashore and come back with a bottle of wine for you," I asked. "What would you say?"

"I'd sooner 'ave beer."

"Well, beer then."

"Why, then I'd say thank yer and may you learn all yer want."

"Right you are!" I said, and left him, to come back a little later with a couple of bottles of Bass.

I hung about the quay all the evening watching the yacht, and I saw the captain go aboard and the crew with him, and when they judged the tide was full they unfurled all their gear and sailed like a ghost into the night.

Then because I was become a very wily hunter I got aboard the train and was in Marseilles hours before he could ever hope to reach it, and waited his arrival.

I kept my vigil, eating out my heart in my impatience, for two long dreary weeks; but I never

saw the snow white yacht, neither could I learn the slightest breath of news of her nor of her whereabouts. I've often wondered since whether I was seen that day in Genoa, or whether the cook was there to watch for such an inconvenient visitor as myself, and if Sir Edward Lorrilow was down below while his watch dog dallied with me, or if he came aboard when the crew did, or how it was he avoided me so cleverly. But that he did avoid me there is not the slightest doubt, and I learnt to my sorrow that too much haste is often-times as fatal as not enough.

About this time reading of the death of old Lady Lorrilow as the result of her injuries, I concluded that he would now condescend to honour England with his presence, so packing up my traps with much of disappointment at my ill success I set out for Paris and Calais.

I stayed in Paris for a day or two to learn the fate of my picture for the Salon, and finding all things going right I betook me to the Gare du Nord, and there, of all the people in the world, I found Bardilow.

He told me he'd been called to Paris for a consultation on a member of the Academie who had a tumour, or an abscess or something, I forget exactly where, my mind being too full of my own affairs just then to grasp the details, and that he had advised postponement of an operation until

the thing was ripe, which would be in two or three weeks or perhaps a month.

Noticing I was very low spirited when we arrived in London, he proposed that we go to one or other of his clubs and make a night of it. So, nothing loth, I accepted his proposal and went into Pall Mall to the Royal Automobile Club of which he was a member, and we had a little supper which very much refreshed me. But finding nothing there to sufficiently distract my thoughts he asked me if I'd like a new sensation, so we walked across to Leicester Square, and entering a harmless looking shop we descended to the bowels of the earth and I found myself within a night club.

I protested at first that this was not the kind of new sensation I was particularly keen about, but he laughed and said he only came for a little flutter. He explained that he had to get excitement somehow for his nature demanded it, and if at any time he wasn't to be found when wanted the odds were ten to one I'd find him here, and such a place as this ought to be particularly interesting to an artist because of the people and their untrammelled Bohemianism.

The Bohemian spirit of this place seemed to consist in shaded lights, and women and little gaming tables and a piano, and people who drank a lot and supped, or whatever name the best befits a meal partaken of 'twixt midnight and the morn;

and they danced upon a square of polished floor while the hungry looking man at the piano worked as I have never seen an artist work before or since, with the sweat running down his neck and crumpling his collar, and a glass of beer upon the top of the instrument which was constantly replenished.

A woman stood upon the dancing square and sang "Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep," a woman with a face like Destiny, so grim was it and so inscrutable, and her voice was the richest bass I've ever heard. This was the only sharp and clear impression that I brought away with me.

Bardilow settled himself at a table and played Chemin de fer, and I watched him win, then lose, then win again, and got as unhealthily excited as he did over it, until four o'clock, when we found a bed at an unpretentious hotel off the Strand.

## CHAPTER XIII

### AN UNLUCKY BIRTHDAY GIFT

IT was at this time that I altered my opinion of Flora Graham and began to discover qualities in her that I had never before suspected; for whereas I had grown to look upon her as a scheming, plotting mass of insincerity, I now began to recognise that this were merely affectation, and that underneath a most unpromising exterior there dwelt a heart that was warm with genuine concern for my well being and for that of Princess Ida.

While I'd been away she'd made herself so useful to my sweet princess, and was such a kind and thoughtful companion that she had found her almost indispensable. She had taught her embroidery and showed her how to work designs in silk and lace and ribbon, and talked of books to her. Moreover she took a vivid interest in our love and did all she could to foster it.

When the time drew near for my little lady's birthday, Flora Graham asked me what I would like to give her for a present. We talked the matter over confidentially and could come to no conclusion, until she suggested that as now she had a studio in Kensington, nothing could be more

appropriate than that I should allow her to paint a miniature of myself which I could frame within a jewel studded oval and present to Margery on the great day. And we agreed to keep the matter a dread and awful secret between ourselves until it was finished.

The upshot of it was I spent less time with Princess Ida and more with Flora Graham, and though my little lady tried to worm my secret from me I kept strictly to our compact and would tell her nothing. However she soon knew I went to Flora Graham's, in that remarkable way that women have of learning things, and she taxed me with it.

Embarrassed by the accusation I blushed and stammered and told her she must trust me. She grew a little angry and then grew cold, and said I took a little bit too much on trust; and when I tried to smooth it down by asking her to come and have an evening at a theatre, she very haughtily declined as she was engaged with her cousin for that evening.

About this time I heard that Sir Edward and Lady Lorrilow were in town and I started off again upon his track, the miniature and everything else obscured by this great news. I found that it was impossible to discover where he was staying, so I used to go out o' mornings and roam

around the clubs and in the park, searching for him, and once I saw my little lady riding with her cousin in the Row, and bowed to her and glared at him, and, though I am as certain as I can be that she saw me, yet she kept her smiling eyes on him and passed me by.

Later in the day I remonstrated with her upon her fickleness, and she retorted that if I chose to spend my time with Flora Graham, surely she had as much right to choose her own companions, that I was only her brother by my own express desire and she considered it somewhat autocratic even of a brother to be angry with his sister because she liked her cousin's escort.

Recognising the fact that she had got me in a vice, and wriggle as I would I could not escape, I protested hotly that I hadn't seen Flora Graham for days and didn't want to, at which she gave me a look which so exasperated me that I nearly blurted out the truth.

"Very well," I said, "when you know the truth you'll be sorry that you doubted me."

"Perhaps," she answered, coldly, "but if the truth is harmless why delay the telling of it?"

"Because I must," I replied; "it's a secret and I promised that I wouldn't tell."

"Then there is a secret between you?" she asked me, sweetly.

“Yes, my dear.”

“That you mustn’t tell me?”

“Yes.”

At which she held her head up haughtily and, giving me a look that froze my blood, left me to my thoughts.

“My sweet Princess!” I cried.

I heard her steps hasten on the stairs and her door slam to above, so putting on my hat I took the bus to Kensington, bent on seeing Flora Graham and telling her that I had altered my mind about the miniature, and would give my little lady something that cost a little less of heartache.

“Miss Graham,” I said, when I had got within the studio, “I’m sorry, but I’ve had enough of this.”

“Enough of what, Jim?” she asked, looking at me from the corners of her soulful eyes.

“Of the miniature,” I answered, bluntly. “I’m sorry but it’s got to stop. I can’t compose myself sufficiently for sittings. Besides now I don’t think I shall have the time.”

“But it’s nearly finished, Jim,” she protested.

“I can’t help that,” I replied. “I must think of something else to give her.”

She studied me a bit before she answered, and her breath came rather fast the while her eyes shone somewhat more brightly than usual.

“I’m sorry you’ve altered your mind, Jim, now

it's so nearly finished too — and she would be pleased to get it, wouldn't she? She'd value it a thousand times more than anything else."

"I suppose she would," I sighed.

"Well, make an effort and come as often as you can, then."

"No," I said, decidedly, "I'm done with it."

"But look here, Jim," she cried. "I can finish it without you."

"Can you really?" I asked her, eagerly.

"Surely," she replied, "if you will let me have a little of your hair and a photograph."

"All right," I answered, "take a bit of hair by all means but I'm afraid I haven't got a photograph."

"You must get one taken," she declared.

I bent down before her while she cut a lock off the top of my head where it wouldn't show, and it was arranged that I should have my photograph taken at once, purchase a suitable frame, write a letter to accompany the gift, and she would post it for me so that my love would get it by first delivery upon her natal day.

As I was leaving the photographer's I ran full tilt into Bardilow.

"Hullo, old chap," he said, "had your photo taken?"

"Yes," I answered before I knew what I was saying.

So then I told him all about it and he promised to help me and said he knew where he could get a frame that was just the thing, a narrow gold one studded with forget-me-nots in turquoise.

After that I renewed my vain attempts to find Sir Edward Lorrilow, and every evening I remained indoors, looking miserable and lonely, except when Flora Graham came when I would do my best to be civil.

At first my sweet Princess was coldly indifferent, but after many such exhibitions of my repentance she began to thaw and her trust in me revived, and she even consented to play bezique with me, and once I even took her to a concert.

One day I received a note from Flora Graham telling me how much the Art School thought of me, how proud they were that I had had my early training there, and that it was the master's wish to give a soirée and invite the local celebrities to meet me, and they hoped I would send a work or two and come myself and bring my sweet Princess. I had a deep abomination for such things but as Margery wanted to go I wrote accepting the invitation.

At that time the birthday was but six days off and the frame in Flora's hands. I invented a greeting and in order that it might go within the case I took a piece of card which I cut to a square shape and wrote the greeting on it.

*From Jim  
the secret  
nobly  
kept*  
*"Wishing my little  
lady  
a very  
Happy Birthday*

Flora Graham had suggested this. She was full of subtle artifice and quaint conceits.

The next day Alec came rushing to me. He had heard that the Lorrilows were living at Ravenhurst! I started at once and before many hours had passed over my head I was back once more within the village that had given me birth, and from which I had been cast abroad in what now appeared to me another life.

## CHAPTER XIV

### I TAKE UP THE SCENT AGAIN

SOON I was at the iron gates and George Pond not being about I strode along the drive unchallenged, until in course of time I stood beneath the portico.

“Is Sir Edward Lorrilow in?” I asked the footman.

“I’ll see, sir,” he replied, ushering me inside. “What name shall I say?”

“Redcar,” I answered. “James Redcar. I am sorry I have not a card.”

“Is he expecting you, sir?” he asked politely.

“I have no doubt he will see me when he hears my name,” I answered, ambiguously.

I was hoping he might think it was the doctor come to see him.

Presently the footman came back again, observing me most curiously and as I thought, with not a little rudeness.

“What name did you say, sir?”

“Redcar,” I answered crossly. “Is he in?”

“I’ll see, sir,” he replied, and vanished once again.

The next time he came back he looked more resolute.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said, edging me towards the door. "Sir Edward is not at home."

"How dare you push me?" I demanded, enraged by the subterfuge. "Tell Sir Edward Lorrilow I must see him at once."

"He's not in, sir," he replied, anxiously, holding wide the door.

Then I lost my temper and blazed at him.

"You liar!" I cried hotly, "he *is* in! You know he's in!"

He bowed extremely low, and before I knew what he was about he caught me round the waist and swung me out upon the stones outside, and before I could regain my feet he had slammed the door behind me.

Arising in a frantic rage I hammered on the door with my fists and with my cane. I wrung the knocker nearly off its hinge and pulled the bell till peal after peal rang out in the hall. Then when my paroxysm had subsided I turned about and hanging my head in simulated chagrin walked moodily and slowly down the drive.

Arrived at the lodge I peered about to see if George were there and finding he was still away I scrambled through the shrubbery and keeping close within its shade went cautiously up the kitchen garden.

A clump of rhododendrons skirted the path that led out into the woods, so into them I crawled

hoping that before the day was done my father might come this way because I felt sure that he would not venture on the road fearing I might be lying in wait for him; and sure enough before I'd been there more than an hour and a half I heard the sound of footsteps coming along the gravel, and peering through the leaves I saw the man for whom I had hunted Europe.

My heart leaped up with joy on seeing him and pumped the blood into my throbbing temples. I clenched my teeth and picking up my cane stepped slowly out before him.

“Sir Edward Lorrilow,” I said, with flashing eyes, “I want a word with you.”

He started back as if he saw a ghost, the colour left his face and he stood trembling for an instant, then rapidly recovering his composure he frowned on me.

“Do you know you’re trespassing, my man?” he demanded.

“Can a man trespass in his father’s park?” I inquired.

He glared at me, his hand twitching nervously on his stick, while I, with my lips grimly set, looked straight ahead.

“Come,” I commanded, “I’m here to settle once for all the question of our relationship.”

“Get off my land!” he ordered.

I smiled my defiance at him.

"I don't leave these grounds," I said, slowly and distinctly, "until you have put me right before the world or I have put you out of it. I'm not going to ask if you are my father because I know you are," and I went up very close to him, "but you are going to tell me before I leave exactly what that title means."

He pushed me from him with so much force that I staggered and nearly fell.

"I've nothing to say to a blackmailer. Get off my land!"

"You blackguard!" I stormed, advancing again upon him, my blood aboil at his insult; "you blackguard! You hound! You dare to call me such a thing as that! I'll thrash you as you stand, you sneak!"

I rushed upon him with my cane upraised.

He parried it, then stung to fury at my words, aimed an answering blow at me; but clutching at his stick I caught it while he struggled hard to wrench it free and heaped abominations on my head.

"Get out!" he roared, "or I'll give you in charge, you —"

He used a word I won't befoul my pen by writing here, suffice it that it told me what I was; brutally and poignantly it stabbed me to the soul so that I gasped in horror as its foul and vicious meaning flooded my understanding. The path

before me turned a vivid red, the rhododendrons and the grass, the trees, the man before me, everything was scarlet.

Snarling like a savage beast, I flung myself upon him, and loosing my hold upon his stick I clutched him by the collar and beat him on the head and face and shoulders with my cane, using the heavy end, while he strove to free himself and strike me in return. Savagely I thrashed him, bruising him and drawing blood unmercifully, until of a sudden my cane snapped short off leaving but a foot or so within my hand; and quick as light he caught my wrist and spinning me about flung me from him so that I hurtled against an elm, smashing my shoulder with sickening force while the park swam round in the intensity of my pain as I lay there moaning.

He came and stood above me, looking down on me with baleful eyes and swollen cheeks and cut and bleeding mouth.

“This means prison for you, my boy,” he panted.

The gleaming of his eyes brought back to me the memory of other eyes that had gleamed at me from out the bracken in the woods beyond the fence one Tuesday afternoon, and a sudden thought occurred to me so sharp and unexpected that, mastering my vertigo, I raised myself upon my elbow and answered him, defiantly.

"Not while Beppo knows."

He reeled from me his broken face gone blue and white, his swollen lips apart and eyes wide with fear. Forgetting my pain in my astonishment I tried to point at him to punctuate my words, then a cry of agony escaped me and I fainted dead away.

. . . . .

When I awoke I was out beyond the gates of Ravenhurst, lying in the bracken where I first had fallen over Beppo. I was very sick and sore and stiff, my shoulder throbbed and my left hand was swollen to nearly twice its normal size, while my arm hung limply to my side as if its bones were broken and its flesh a mass of pulp.

But I was thankful. I knew that I had hurt him both in body and in spirit.

I didn't even wonder how I'd got here for I knew that he had had me carried out because he was afraid. I knew he wouldn't dare to show his face abroad for days because of the cuts and bruises I had given him, and I knew that I was master of him and that he had lied when he had called me what he did, because his blood had turned to water at the mention of the name of Beppo.

So very carefully and painfully I stood upright, and seeking out the station sat in the refreshment

room reviving my shattered nerves with brandy while I waited for the train.

They had to wake me at the Junction and again at Waterloo, and when the cab drew up at the doctor's house I had to wait outside while the cabman went and fetched assistance.

The doctor came out hotfoot with Princess Ida at his heels looking full of sweet concern, and together they helped me up the steps and into the drawing room.

“Treat me tenderly,” I said, as they set to work to get my coat and waistcoat off. “I’m very nearly dead, but I’m also very nearly happy.”

“Ye don’t say that,” cried the doctor, exulting. “Did he acknowledge ye then? Tell me that?”

“Not exactly,” I answered, “but he wouldn’t give me in charge.”

“Wouldn’t give you in charge, Jimmy?” gasped Princess Ida. “I should think not, indeed. Why should he?”

“For trespassing and breaking in, and assault and battery, and committing murder with intent to do grievous bodily harm,” I answered, smiling up into her eyes.

“What do you mean?” she inquired.

“It isn’t my fault he’s alive,” I answered. “I did my best. Steady, Guv’nor! Oh!”

When the dear old doctor had gone over me, and felt and prodded and pounded me gently, he

declared there was nothing amiss beyond the fact that my shoulder had slipped its moorings, and cautioning me to brace myself, he brought his mighty strength to bear upon it so that it shot back into its socket with a loud report. The lights danced for just an instant, till my little lady's soothing voice besought me to sip a little brandy after which the doctor bound my shoulder for me, and when everything was nice and comfortable they led me straight to bed.

## CHAPTER XV

### I LOSE MY LITTLE BIT OF RIBBON

I TOLD the doctor everything and my little lady just as much as I thought she ought to know. Our efforts to trace the whereabouts of Beppo and old Bill Blay were renewed and in a couple of days I was up and about again. Then came the day appointed for my ordeal at the Art School, and though my little lady begged me not to go, I went, because I had arranged with Flora Graham that she should bring the miniature and let me have a last look at it before she sent it off.

It was quite a brilliant reception and I found myself the centre of a little group consisting of the Art School master, Flora Graham, the doctor, my little lady, members of the school committee, a royal duchess, and the mayor, and received congratulations galore.

Flora Graham took me underneath her wing and showed me off as if I belonged to her, while Princess Ida watched the whole affair with a disapproving eye.

Flora introduced me to her father, a thin spare man, every inch a lawyer.

“This is my Jimmy, Dad,” she said.

"I'm verra pleased to meet you, Mister Redcar," he rejoined, taking my hand and shaking it with much warmth. "I've heard an awfu' lot about you from my dochter here."

I never knew Flora Graham so charming and attentive as she was that night, in fact her sweetness cloyed and I tried to get rid of her, but she linked her arm in mine and kept beside me looking supremely happy and triumphant, and I really think she must have invited all her friends and relations, so many of them were there.

Bardilow had been invited, but of course he didn't come. However, when the evening was about half way through a telegram was brought to me which opening I found to be from him.

"Hearty condolences. May your ordeal soon be over, old chap!"

"BARDILOW."

I took it across to show to my sweet Princess, but though she smiled languidly she wasn't deeply interested. It seemed to cause her much effort to show a spark of interest in anything that night. She seemed lost and deeply introspective and watched me always with a look I could in no wise fathom, and was almost rude to Flora Graham. I asked her anxiously if she thought the place too warm for her, and would she like to go home

when her father went, as he was going early. Immediately she bridled up and declared she would not go till I did, and begged me very sweetly to go back to Flora Graham.

I was consigning Flora Graham and the soirée and all her works to regions that I thought more fitting, when here came Flora herself.

“Don’t you want to see the miniature, Jim?” she whispered.

“Of course I do,” I whispered back. “Where is it?”

“I’ve got it in the office,” she replied, and getting up she beckoned me to follow.

I told my little lady I’d be back very soon, a remark which she didn’t deign to answer, and I followed in Flora’s wake. Half way across the room Flora turned about and linked her arm in mine and so we wormed our way down the stairs; and though I didn’t see them I could feel my Princess Ida’s eyes were on me all the time, burning through my back and searching out my heart.

And I smiled to think how overjoyed she’d be when our secret was divulged to her.

Arrived within the office Flora closed the door and stood before me with shining eyes, her breath coming very fast and a hectic flush on either cheek.

“Where is it, Miss Graham?” I asked.

“I’ve got it safe,” she answered, breathlessly, looking towards the inner room, then taking the

lapels of my coat within her hands she asked me a sudden question.

“What do you think of it, Jimmy?”

“Think of what?” I answered, wondering.

“Why, everything,” she answered. “The soirée, me?”

“Oh,” said I, “it’s wonderfully kind of you to think about it and go to all this trouble.”

She cast her head down at this and lifted up her eyes.

“Is that the only thanks you’ve got to offer me?” she asked, a little hurt.

“Why, what else can I offer?” I replied.

“What else can you offer?” she demanded passionately. “What do you suppose I went to all this trouble for? Why do you think I’ve done all this for you? Oh, Jimmy, you blind fool! Can’t you see how I love you? Can’t you see I’ve loved you from the start?”

I staggered back, aghast at the girl’s boldness and effrontery, while she stood by with arms held out and head upon one side, measuring me up with a smile of certain triumph on her lips.

“Where’s the miniature?” I demanded, thickly.

Her smile broadened, and putting her fingers on a blue ribbon that fell from her neck into the lace within her bosom, she fingered it, lovingly.

“I’ll always wear it upon my heart, my love,” she answered.

“Miss Graham,” I protested, conquering my amazement, “this isn’t playing the game. Let’s have it and stop this fooling. You don’t mean it, you know.”

“Jim,” she said, looking very coy, “you can have it on one condition.”

“Well, what is that?” I asked, relieved.

“Come and kiss me for it.”

I recoiled again on hearing this, then falling back upon my native cunning decided to humour her. If I pretend to fall in with her, thought I, I can get close enough to snatch the ribbon and so regain my locket and ever after keep it safe from such a scheming guardian.

“All right, if that’s the penalty I’ll pay it,” I said, firmly.

She came upon me in a great rush, and throwing her arms about my neck clung to me in a passionate embrace.

“Oh, Jim!” she said, “of course I will!”

I was startled at her words, but more astounded still to see Miss Purvis looking out upon us from the inner room. I struggled desperately to free myself from this clinging gorgon, and in doing so my shoulder got a wrench which sent a tongue of living flame down my arm, and shouting in my agony I toppled over where I stood and everything went black.

My eyes opened on Princess Ida kneeling down

before me. My collar was gone, my shirt unbuttoned and my face and hair were dripping wet. My head lay back upon a downy couch so soft and warm that it slowly dawned on me that I was lying on the floor with my head supported by the treacherous bosom of Flora Graham. Recalling in a flash how it was I came to such a pass I staggered to my feet, and declining all offers of assistance begged my sweet Princess to get her things on as I was going home at once.

So presently it came to pass that we two were seated in a comfortable carriage bound for home. I was feeling very sick and faint and my shoulder pained me so much that I closed my eyes and slept throughout the journey. When I prepared myself for bed I discovered to my horror that my little bag of oil silk was open and the ribbon gone!

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE CASE FOR THE PROSECUTION

THE first thing I did the next day was to write a curt and bitter note to Flora Graham.

“Miss Graham, please give bearer my miniature, the photograph and *all* things else you have of mine, for that page in my life is blotted out for good. What a fool I was to trust my happiness to you!

“JAMES REDCAR.”

Then I wandered restlessly about the house looking and longing for my sweet Princess. I sent a message to her room but she wasn’t up. I sent another asking when she would be up. She didn’t know, she wasn’t very well. What was the matter with her? She had a headache. Would she be down for lunch? She couldn’t say. She wished I wouldn’t bother her as she was resting.

I bit my lip and fumed and fussed and scowled and worked my hands.

I longed for some companionship, for some one who would share my woe and ease my over-bur-

dened heart. The doctor was engaged upon his patients in the consulting room so he was out of the question. I couldn't 'phone to Bardilow because the doctor was using the 'phone, and it was more than my life was worth to disconnect him. I daren't go to Alec because of Flora Graham.

So I sent another message to my sweet Princess, a written one this time.

“It is most imperative that I see you as soon as you are able.”

She returned it to me with her answer scrawled across the face.

“I fail to see the necessity.”

After a while my messenger returned from Flora Graham bringing nothing with him.

“Didn't they give you a package?” I asked.

“No, sir.”

“Who took in the letter?”

“A young lady, sir.”

“What sort of a young lady?”

He grinned.

“Oh — a fair un, sir, wiv floppy 'air.”

“What did she say when you gave her the letter?”

“No answer, sir.”

“No answer?”

“No, sir.”

I gave him a shilling and let him go. What was the meaning of this? What was her game? Did she intend to send it after all or what did she mean to do? Finding no answer to any of my questions I flew into a rage about the miniature and everything connected with it. Even if she sent it, I swore I wouldn’t let my little lady have it. Nothing in any way connected with Flora Graham should ever be in her possession. I was done with her after last night. My sweet Princess thought me false and fickle and a flirt, all because of that infernal secret.

Well, it would be a secret no longer, for I’d get the picture back at any cost, but that of seeing her, and having got it back would burn it and put another in its frame, one by a photographer this time. Also I should give my little lady a new present.

So off I went down Oxford Street, and after spending hours looking in the shops finally discovered something to my taste in Piccadilly, a butterfly brooch in brilliants with sapphire eyes. I bought it just because those eyes reminded me of hers in certain moods, and there was a poetic fitness in the butterfly reminding her of me.

When I got back I met her in the hall just going out, and she looked drawn and ill and very haughty, and would have passed me by but that

I laid my hand upon her arm and leading her into the drawing room sat her on a chair.

"Now," I said, "you're not going out like that."

"I'm going out exactly as I please," she answered, icily.

"My Princess Ida."

"Don't you dare to call me Princess Ida any more," she flashed.

"Not call you Princess Ida? Why—"

"I told you once that only those who loved me called me that."

"But, my sweet, I love you more than all the world."

She looked me up and down with bitter scorn.

"Show me my ribbon," she demanded.

And then when I paled she demanded it of me again.

"If you love me, where's my ribbon?"

I stammered foolishly that I had lost it.

"Lost it?" she cried. "Have you been unfortunate enough to lose it? But, perhaps, you forgot that you ever owned it. Such a little thing as that was much too insignificant for your mind. I should ask your hostess of last night about it. I've no doubt she could tell you where it is. She might even be able to recall where and when she burnt it — that is, if it's not *too* insignificant for either of you to remember."

The words I'd used at Christmas came back

to my mind and danced before my eyes in letters of living fire.

“When that is no longer there you’ll know that I have ceased to love you.”

“My dear,” I said, beseechingly, “I can explain.”

“Oh, I shouldn’t bother,” she responded, cruelly, getting up and going to the door.

How I spent the rest of the day I don’t know, except that I went into a restaurant somewhere in Soho for lunch and ordered every dish upon the menu and sent it back again untasted. And then I went out and roamed about and wandered here and there and everywhere; but never could I escape the misery that haunted me.

I thought about my little lady and the way that she had spoken to me. I recalled how she had avoided me all morning, and how she had snubbed me and lashed me when we met. I thought how shallow and superficial women must be that she could think so low of me, and then I thought how deep they were when Flora Graham’s plot came to my mind. I cursed the day that I’d been born.

But try as I would I couldn’t unravel the mystery of my bit of ribbon. If Flora had purloined it, where was it?

That evening the doctor was very short with me and often I caught him looking at me as if weighing me up; and, when I asked where Prin-

cess Ida was, he told me with much abruptness she was out of sorts and had gone early to bed.

And the next day finding that she still kept her room and wouldn't condescend to answer my anxious enquiries concerning her health, I felt unjustly treated and wandered about consumed with bitterness.

I went into the Park and burned and shivered under the trees, and meandered there till the afternoon when I had a very scanty meal at a restaurant in Soho, and stayed there thinking, thinking, thinking, till late into the evening, when, feeling very sick and out of heart, I turned my steps towards home again.

As I opened the door of the doctor's house the boy in buttons told me that the doctor had been asking for me for nearly half an hour, and that he was very anxious I should go up to the study just as soon as I came home, and that Miss Redcar was ill.

So up to the Holy of Holies went I, and there was the doctor and Flora Graham's father, also, and the doctor was looking very pained and stern and Mister Graham didn't offer me his hand.

"This is a bad business, young man," began the doctor.

"What is?" I enquired shortly, nettled at his tone.

"That is, that's what is, sir," fiercely broke in

Mister Graham, handing me the letter I had sent demanding the return of my miniature.

“ Well, what of it? ” I asked when I had looked it through. “ Have you brought the things with you? ”

At which they blazed at me together, Irish brogue and Scottish accent battling to be heard above the other.

“ Come out o’ that, young man, ” demanded Doctor Redcar, “ this is not a matter to be treated flippantly, let me tell ye that. ”

“ All right, all right, ” I said, sitting in a chair and looking from one to the other for a little light, “ if there’s anything to row about why bring it out and let’s have it, only don’t get so excited over it. ”

On hearing which they looked one at the other meaningly, and whispered together for a moment. Then Mister Graham in his best cross examination manner took up the foil and engaged me.

“ Did you write this letter to my dochter! ” he asked, holding it out for me to see.

“ Of course I did. What about it? ”

“ Don’t give me any impertinence, sir. Answer me yes or no. ”

“ If you’ll tell me what you’re driving at I’ll consider whether you’ve the right to ask, ” I answered, with not a little heat.

"Come, come, me bye," broke in the doctor, "this is a very serious matter and ye'll do me a faavour if ye'll just answer Mister Graham here truthfully, without any high falutin back talk, let me tell ye that."

"Is it your wish that I should submit to his insolence, sir?" I asked.

"It is my wish that you answer his questions, James."

"Very good, sir, as you wish it," I replied, then to Mister Graham, "Fire away," I said.

"Did you write this letter?" again commenced counsel for the prosecution.

"Yes."

"And did you send it to my dochter?"

"Yes."

"Did you expect a reply?"

"I did."

"And what reply did you expect?"

"I expected her to return my miniature and — and the other things."

"What other things?"

"Why, the photograph and the locket, and my lock of hair and the ribbon she stole."

"What photograph?"

"The one I gave her to paint the miniature from."

"Oh, you gave it to her to paint the miniature

from, did you? Did you ever call on her at her Studio?"

"Yes."

"More than once?"

"Many a time."

"Had you any object in calling on her?"

"Of course I had."

"What was it?"

"Why, so that she might paint the miniature."

"And what was the lock of hair for?" he asked, sarcastically.

"For her to get the colour from," I answered.

"Now, sir," he demanded, standing up, "if you were going to the Studio to be painted, will you be so good as to tell me what necessity there was to give her the lock of hair at all?"

"I have said to get the colour from."

"But you were going there yourself."

"Yes, at the start, but then I found I couldn't come, she asked me for the hair to finish it with."

"And what was the object in giving her the photograph, if you were going there yourself?"

"For the same reason, because she asked me for it as I found the sittings a nuisance."

"Was the miniature in a frame?"

"Not when I saw it."

"Was there a frame?"

"Yes, I sent her one."

"Oh, you sent her one. Now, tell me, is it usual for a sitter when he has his portrait painted to leave it behind in a gold frame studded with forget-me-nots, with a lock of hair enclosed in the back and a loving inscription behind the hair?"

I stammered that I didn't understand.

"Answer my question, please," he commanded, sternly. "Is it usual?"

"No."

"Is it usual when you give an artist a photograph to work from, to enclose the picture in a silver frame and stick a loving inscription on the back?"

"What are you talking about, sir?" I exploded.

"Answer, Jim, answer," broke in the doctor.

"Very well, as you wish it, but under protest," I replied. "It is not."

Then the man of law smiled very grimly and held my locket out that I might see.

"Is that your miniature?" he asked.

"It is."

"Is that your frame?"

"It is."

Then turning it about he showed me the glass back with my hair curled round inside it.

"Is that your hair?"

"Yes, it is, but I don't understand —"

“Never mind about understanding,” he interrupted, brusquely, as he opened the locket.

“Is that your writing?”

He showed me the inscription I had written on the card, or part of it that is, the top part cut out to fit inside the frame, and I read to my horror —

Flora — Jim  
the secret  
nobly kept

“Good God!” I exclaimed, “the little devil!”

“Come, come, sir!” thundered my examiner, “answer my question. Is that your writing?”

“Yes, it is,” I replied, my breath coming very fast, “but I never wrote ‘Flora,’ I wrote ‘from.’”

But he waived aside my explanation and held out to me the photograph.

“Is that your photograph?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“Did you have it specially taken for her?”

“I did.”

“Is that your frame?”

“No, it is not.”

“Oh, it is not your frame!” he repeated in much surprise.

Turning it about I saw the other part of the card, the whole of which should have gone to

Ida yesterday, pasted on the back, "wishing my little lady a very happy birthday."

"Is that your writing?"

"Yes, it is," I answered, shortly, squaring my jaw and glaring at him.

"Then will you kindly explain your intentions towards my dochter?"

"With pleasure," I replied.

"Then what are they, sir?"

"Simply this," I answered, getting up and standing by the desk and glaring at him with eyes gone very bright, and with flaming cheeks, "I shall brand your precious daughter as a lying, crawling, thieving minx. I shall drive her out of Art as she has tried to drive me out of happiness, and ever after shun her as a leprous beast. That is my intention."

He clenched his fists at my furious outburst, and the doctor scenting trouble came between us, commanding me sternly to keep my temper and Mister Graham to keep an eye on his.

"Was it your intention to marry my dochter?" the Scotchman demanded.

"Don't be a fool," I retorted.

"Was it, or was it not?" he thundered.

"It was not," I shouted, banging my hand on the table.

"Then was it your intention just to play with her?"

“That’s a lie,” I answered, quickly.

“Stop yer abuse, Jim,” commanded the doctor, sternly, “and tell us what yer intention was.”

“My intention,” I answered, “was to give the miniature to your daughter, Miss Redcar, as a present for her birthday to-day, sir. Miss Graham suggested it and like a fool I fell in with her suggestion. I went to the Studio a lot of times, and then when Princess Ida objected to my going — we were keeping it a secret from her, again at Miss Graham’s suggestion — I told Miss Graham that I couldn’t come any more as I had altered my mind and would give your daughter something else and she needn’t finish the miniature. Then she pleaded that Princess Ida would be so delighted with it that it was a pity to abandon it, and asked for a lock of hair and a photograph, and like a fool I gave them to her. I sent her the frame and the inscription for her to put inside the box, and it was all on one card which I wrote as she suggested, only I put From Jim, not Flora, and she was going to post it. That was my intention — that and nothing else — as God sees me.”

“Oh,” said Mister Graham, “that was all, was it? Then if you went to see her so many times and gave her all these things, how was it that after all the miniature was done at a photographer’s?”

"Done at a photographer's?" I gasped.

"Done at a photographer's," he replied, "the same photographer's who took the photograph," and he showed me their signature drawn across the bottom.

"I am very sorry to say that you have a most unscrupulous daughter," I replied.

"If you had no intentions towards her, why did you make advances towards her at the soirée the other night?" he demanded, mercilessly.

"I did no such thing," I retorted, hotly. "It's an infamous and a monstrous lie. She took me in the office to show me the miniature and when we got inside made violent love to me."

"You proposed to her and she accepted you, you scoundrel," he replied, with great indignation.

"That's a lie—"

"Miss Purvis saw and heard it all," he broke in. "And saw you take her in your arms and kiss her."

I was silent at this, too stunned and out of heart at the vile plot thus unfolded before me to make any reply. So this was her game, was it? As she couldn't coax me into matrimony she would marry me by force, would she? Or so blacken me in Princess Ida's eyes that she would cast me off, or her father turn me out. Well, if he chose to believe this tale let him. He ought to know

me better and I was much too sick to argue further.

"Have you nothing to say to that?" he asked me after a bit.

"What's the use?" I answered, wearily, "an honest man doesn't stand a chance against a lawyer."

"Ah, come out of that, Jim!" broke in the doctor. "Mister Graham here accuses you of dallying with his daughter. Did you kiss her or did you not?"

"Kiss her?" I retorted, viciously, and spat into the fireplace. "Look here," I said, "you've had your turn with me, now give me a chance to clear myself. This woman made a set at me from the start. She came and lived in Alec's house to keep near me, she pestered me with letters while I was in Italy and wrote me every fortnight, but I hardly ever answered. She weaved her artful nets about me pretending to be so friendly, but I always loathed and despised her. Then lately she made a great deal of Ida, and thought out all this secret about the miniature, and got up her hateful soirée all to get me in her net. The Lord knows why. What was Miss Purvis doing there? I suppose she was there to witness the proposal," I commented, bitterly.

"She was there in her professional capacity, reporting for the local paper," replied the lawyer.

"H'm," I sneered. "I've nothing more to

say, now, but give me a week to collect my witnesses and you'll see who is the liar. At present it's her word against mine, and prejudice and evidence in her favour."

"What witnesses?" asked Mister Graham, sharply.

"Mind your own business," I replied, "you'll see them when they're ready, not before."

"Is that all your answer?"

"It is."

"Very well, then, you'll hear further from me," and bowing to the doctor he collected his exhibits as he called them and departed.

When he had gone the doctor looked very grave and stern.

"James, I don't like it, let me tell ye that. It looks very black against you and I'm thinking that ye'll have a job to clear yerself. My poor girl's been miserable for days. I've caught her crying to herself many a time of late, and she doesn't eat and doesn't sleep, and if I find that you're the cause of it, why, me bye, ye'll wish ye'd never seen me, let me tell ye that."

"Looks black, you think, do you?" I retorted, coldly. "Well, when it comes to Doctor Redcar swallowing every tale that he hears to my disadvantage, then I'm done. I've nothing more to say. I'm ready to admit that it was silly — making such a secret of it — but it was

only to give Margery a surprise. But as for you, sir, you're a specialist in minds and a sportsman and I've given you credit for a larger proportion of sense than to think me capable of such behaviour. You with your memorandum pad and your analysis, to be taken in by all this gaudy circumstantial nonsense, and professing to know me as you do. You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"James, how dare you!" he blazed.

"I'm content to bide my time," I continued, waving aside his interruption with curling lip, "and until that is ripe take my advice and when in doubt consult your memorandum pad."

With which I left him.

In a very sad and surly frame of mind I went out into the street again, feeling very hurt and miserable and sore depressed. To think that Doctor Redcar of all men could be so easily taken in cut me to the quick; to think that he should believe this circumstantial chain with which they hoped to drag me down without first testing it link by link, hurt my pride so that I would let him believe anything rather than defend myself any more.

Suppose the photographer's name was on the miniature, what of that? Why, they would be the first to prove it was a forgery, put there by that scheming witch to blacken my reputation. What if Miss Purvis had seen me in her arms

and heard her say "of course I will," why then she'd heard it all, all the shameful interview, and she loved Flora Graham just as much as I did, I'd take my oath on that.

And Bardilow could substantiate the innocent intent that underlay that wretched secret. Thank God I'd told him all about it! And as for the inscriptions, they could join them up again and any fool could see that they were one. But what stumped me was the fiendish cunning of the alteration, adding just a touch to "from" to make it "Flora."

I had eaten nothing since the morning, for my appetite was gone and nothing but a nausea remained, while through my fevered brain there drummed the never ceasing question, the ribbon — who's got it? The ribbon — who's got it? The ribbon — who's got it? Until I was fit to scream at its senseless repetition.

Presently, when it was nearly midnight and the cold was more than I could bear, I made my shivering way back to my mockery of a home and sat me by the empty fireplace, wishing it were Christmas once again if only that I might see a blaze. The doctor had gone out to see a prize fight or something, Princess Ida long ago in bed, so I sat and mourned within myself that people were so ready to misjudge me and others so willing to do me hurt.

I must have sat there more than half an hour when the telephone bell rang loudly in the consulting room. I didn't heed it. Again it rang insistently and again I showed not the slightest interest. There was a pause for just a moment or two, and then it rang more persistently than before and because its jangling discord irritated me beyond endurance I got up and answered it.

"Is that Doctor Redcar's house?" enquired a voice.

"Yes."

"Is Doctor Redcar in?"

"No."

"Oh, is Mister James Redcar in?"

"Yes, speaking."

"Oh, Mister Redcar, this is Doctor Bardilow's man speaking. Have you seen Doctor Bardilow to-day, sir?"

"No, I haven't."

"Oh, have you any idea where he is, sir?"

"Not the slightest. I haven't seen him for days."

"Thank you, sir. I wish I could find him."

"Why, is it important?" I asked.

"Yes, sir, very. There's a message just come through saying that he must be in Paris to-morrow for an operation as the patient might die if left any longer."

"Oh," I answered, recalling the cause of our

meeting in the French capital, "I'm very sorry, but I can't help you."

"Thank you very much, sir," said the voice, "I'm sorry to trouble you. Good night, sir."

"Good night," I answered, and hung up the receiver.

I wished very heartily that I could find Bardilow on my own account. He would never give credence to such a garbled concoction as the doctor had so readily listened to. And wishing he were here I suddenly remembered the night club. Why, to be sure, of course that's where he was! He was bitten with the gaming fly as once he had been with the brandy. Roused to febrile life, once more I went out into the hall, and putting on my hat and coat set out to find him.

The next thing I knew I was within the harmless looking shop in Leicester Square, asking the porter for Mister Barlow, the name Bardilow used at this resort. The porter asked me to sign my name within the visitor's book and then ushered me through the bar to the depths below.

Bardilow was sitting at a table, flushed and shiny eyed, intent upon the cards before him, with a pile of gold and silver at his hand.

He merely nodded and motioned to me not to disturb him, but I took no notice of his warning and whispered in his ear.

"Have you forgotten Paris?"

“Good Lord, old chap!” he exclaimed. “I’d clean forgotten it!”

And then his interest in the game vanished as the snow before the sun, for he was a surgeon first and last and all the time.

“Well,” said I, “you’ve got to be there to-morrow.”

“To-morrow is it?” he replied. “To-day you mean. What time is it?”

Taking out my presentation watch I showed him it was just one o’clock.

Then explaining to his friends that he’d been called away he started to leave the table, but the others made a lot of fuss, and protested that he did it just because his luck was in and he was winning. A fellow jostled me most rudely and said he knew the dodge, it was an old trick and it wouldn’t work, and Mister Barlow ought to stop and finish the game. I would have struck him, only Bardilow prevented me. Then he threw his winnings on the table, and said if that was how they took it, there was their money. Take what they’d lost and go to blazes. He was done with them.

The secretary hearing the disturbance came to see what all the trouble was about, and settled matters amicably, but Bardilow couldn’t be persuaded to pick his winnings up again.

When we got to the street he thanked me very

much and told me what a lot hung on this operation. He declared that if he had missed it he'd have been a ruined man, and said that he would go straight home and gather up his things, and start for Dover in his car so as to catch the early packet. He begged me to let him take me home in his taxi, but by that time I was feeling queer and thought the walk would do me good.

He was hardly gone when putting my hand inside my coat to see the time, I found my pocket was empty and my watch was gone! I burst into a fury and going back to the harmless looking shop essayed to pass the porter, but he barred my passage until feeling very helpless with my injured arm I raved at him and made such a commotion that the secretary came out to see what all the fuss was about.

When I'd told him what had happened, he looked very serious and annoyed and thought I must be mistaken, but I was so extremely positive that I had my watch when I entered, and told him how I'd looked at it before those men and women, that he begged me not to make a fuss but wait for just a minute and perhaps he could get it for me.

When he went down-stairs I followed him and pointed out the man who'd jostled me, and after a lot of quiet talk and argument on the part of that wonderful secretary my watch was found beneath the table and handed back to me.

He had hardly done so when there came a scuffle and a rush at the end of the room.

“Stand where you are,” a voice called, imperiously. “In the King’s name!”

With horror I realized that the club was raided and that all of us, myself included, were under close arrest.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE SENTENCE

THERE was a dreadful silence for just an instant, everybody standing up and looking cowed and agitated. Then the lights went out, and in the darkness that followed people scurried here and there like beetles in a trap, tables were overturned, glasses smashed and coins scattered everywhere upon the floor with a musical chink and jingle. Men and women jostled me and trod upon my feet, and cursed each other, and soon — like flotsam on the tide — I was carried to the regions above.

Here a scuffling commotion added chaos to disorder, and some one kept angrily demanding for the lights to be turned on. Going I knew not whither, and running cautiously I came full tilt upon a yielding bulk that threw its arms about me and held me tight. I strove to free myself from his embrace, but my right hand coming in contact with a row of cold, metallic buttons, I realised with horror I was captured; so I surrendered with as good a grace as I could muster, and submitted to the officer's restraining grasp.

Then some one, having found the switches, turned the lights up.

“Look here, old chap, let me go and I’ll make it worth your while,” I said to my captor. “I’m not a member of the club.”

“So! You’d try to bribe a horficer, would you? All right, my beauty, hall the worse for you,” he replied, in simulated indignation.

“But I’m not a member,” I protested.

“You can tell that to the magistrate.”

“Good Lord! you’re not going to —”

“Not going to!” he scoffed, “I’ve got you, me beauty, an’ you struck me, too, an’ tried to bribe me.”

“I did not strike you,” I answered, heatedly. “I never touched you.”

“Now, then, come on, not so much of it,” he replied, twisting my wrist with great brutality as he led me to where the inspector stood, taking the keys and the books from the secretary, and marshallng his prisoners, of which there were about thirty, the others having escaped in the confusion.

I appealed to the munificence and justice of my captor’s chief.

“Inspector,” I cried, “I’m not a member here.”

He nodded grimly.

“Bring him along.”

“But I’m not a member I tell you,” I shouted.

"I suppose you'd only come to see a friend?" he asked me, caustically.

"Yes," I replied.

"Just like all the rest of 'em. Fall in."

In deep despair I took my place within that shameful cavalcade, and in a short time I found myself, speechless and in a burning fever, with my head on fire and my shoulder aching, in the charge room of the Vine Street Police Station.

When my turn came I was charged with being found upon premises used for illicit gaming, with assaulting the police, obstructing them in the execution of their duty, attempting to bribe an officer and being drunk and disorderly. Thunderstruck at the charge I could only stammer my denial in a voice that shook and halted, and because I would not give them my address was placed with many others in a large, bare cell to wait the hour of magisterial enquiry.

All through those dragging hours I never ceased from pacing back and forth, and up and down the confines of my prison, my brain on fire with the shame and misery of my situation.

They brought me a cup of cocoa and a small brown loaf soon after sun up, but I waved it away and continued with my pacing. At half past nine they took me out into the yard, and seating me within the station omnibus, drove me, a silent and unwilling passenger, to Bow Street. There my

fellow captives and myself were placed before the dock, and charged with frequenting an unlicensed club, and gambling there, and drinking there; and many were fined, and some remanded, while I was put back to be heard a little later upon the graver crimes of assaulting, attempting to bribe, obstruction, and all the other counts on the indictment that my captor had so assiduously prepared for me.

When the time came I refuted passionately the foul charges brought against me. I swore that far from being drunk I was really very ill, and showed my strapped and bandaged shoulder in corroboration. I swore that I had not struck the constable, and the bruise being on his right cheek and my left hand out of commission, the learned magistrate gave me reluctantly the benefit of the doubt. And as for obstructing the police I merely tried to get away, as any other man in my position would have done. I admitted that in my panic I had foolishly said that I would make it worth the constable's while to allow me to depart, but I had said it thoughtlessly and without intent to commit offence. But as for being a member of such a disreputable club, or using it for any other purpose a reference to the visitor's book would prove the falsity of that, as I had gone to find a friend who was urgently sought after, and had signed my name as I went in.

Then the visitor's book was produced, and the lawyer went through it searching for the name of Arthur Prince, and as he couldn't find it he handed it to me. To my horror I found the name of James Redcar in the member's column, as introducing one by name of Barlow!

The magistrate very caustically suggested that if I could recall the member's name for whom I went in search it might perhaps assist me, but I refused point blank to tell him that because Bardilow's honour was in my keeping.

Then he asked me would I care for a remand so that I might get in touch with my friend and bring him here to prove my tale. My heart leapt at the opportunity until I remembered that I must give them my address, so I shook my head again, and thanking him refused. I was determined that Bardilow's secret must be kept at any cost, and the doctor's name must not be mentioned in the records of a sordid case like this.

The magistrate shook his head over me.

"Arthur Prince, I am not at all satisfied that you do not deserve to suffer on all the charges entered here against you; but there is a doubt, and the law commands that any doubt existing must go to the benefit of the accused, so I am helpless. If it were not for your injured arm I should say that you had struck the officer, and struck him viciously, so you have that to thank that you are free to go

on that count. As regards obstruction there is again much to say in your favour, as, according to the inspector, you went to the station quietly and gave no trouble when there. Your candid admission of your attempt to bribe the officer I must also allow to weigh in your favour, coupled as it is with a very feasible explanation. Neither is the evidence strong enough, unsupported, to convict you of the charge of being drunk, and again you have your injured arm to thank; but as regards the grave offence of frequenting an abominable resort such as this proved to be, there is not the slightest doubt that you were there, and there for an illegal purpose. On your own admission this is not the first time you have been there, and your futile explanations and incredible story of a friend, easy enough to corroborate if true, merely aggravate your offence. It is my intention whenever anybody is brought here charged with using such pernicious institutions as night clubs, to treat such persons with the utmost severity, and on that count you are fined five pounds and costs."

So they took me to the office, where I wrote a cheque and had to wait in bondage till it was cashed and the money in their hands. By this time, my mind, released from the tension it had lately undergone, gave way to melancholy and my head ached and throbbed as it had never ached before, and occasionally I relapsed into periods of

nothingness — when all was black — and when I was myself again my guardian was looking at me queerly, so that I was very self conscious in consequence. But after a while the messenger returned with the money, and I was free to go.

I went out into the street again, and again I wandered aimlessly, sometimes dreaming I was in the maze with little Princess Ida, and coming to myself discovered I was calling her. Then I longed to go to sleep again because of the awful melancholy and depression that assailed my conscious moments; and I tried to cheer myself by saying that no one would ever connect convicted Arthur Prince with James Redcar, or Jim the unclassified who was once a grub but was now a pitiable worm crushed beneath a mountain of woe, and malice, and misadventure. Presently, waking from a dream, I found myself leaning on the low wall of the Thames Embankment, just beyond Cleopatra's Needle, gazing at the murky stream below with awful fascination, and an impulse coming over me, very powerful and uncontrollable, I tried to get over the parapet, because I saw my sweet Princess in the stream beckoning to me and holding up my little bit of ribbon.

A well dressed man took hold of me and pulled me back and asked if I knew what I was doing, and coming to myself again I thanked him lucidly, and told him that I'd had a sleepless night and didn't

quite know, perhaps, what I was about. He told me he once had been homeless and had thrown himself into the river just as I had tried to do, but being rescued his luck had turned and here he was, a prosperous man. So cheer up, my boy.

Some time after this I found myself in my room at the doctor's house, and looking round in my astonishment espied the washstand, so pouring out near a basin full of water I put my fevered face therein, and opening my mouth drank great gulps of it, after which I washed and felt a great deal better; but still the pain about my shoulder and the ball of fire in my head was almost more than I could bear, while my pulses throbbed and my heart drummed against my ribs.

Presently the housemaid knocked on the door to tell me the doctor wished to see me. I went down to the study, stumbling upon my way, with my stubborn will goading my semi-conscious brain into a semblance of life, and checking the insistent desire to lapse again into the land of dreams.

The doctor was like a thundercloud, his eyes ablaze with passion.

“When did you come home?” he demanded, as soon as I stood before him.

“Oh, some time,” I answered, vaguely.

“Where were you last night?”

“Oh — er — *out* and about.”

"Out and about?" he thundered, "out and about? How is it you were not in bed?"

"Because I couldn't get here," I replied, with a frantic effort to collect my thoughts.

He handed me the evening paper with a gesture of finality.

"What's the meaning o' that?" he inquired, showing me a report of my case.

"Just my infernal luck again," I answered, laughing bitterly; "another crime to add to the last."

"What were you doing there?" he demanded, angrily.

"That I can't tell you," I replied.

"Then I am to draw me own conclusions?"

"Draw what you like," I protested, passionately. "If you believe that Flora Graham nonsense you'll believe anything, no matter what I say."

"James, I'm astonished," he said, "and bitterly disappointed. Ye've come back from Italy nothing better than a loose, low libertine."

"Doctor Redcar," I retorted, "you've no right to say that. I've come back as I said I would, a clean, straight, honourable man. If you weren't so blind you'd see that, but you're drunk, sir, drunk with passion. The image of Princess Ida has kept me pure —"

"Don't you dare befoul her name with your licentious tongue," he interrupted.

I started back as if he'd struck me.

"I was there," I said, "to save a friend from shame."

"Who was your friend?"

"That I have said I cannot tell you."

"But you've been there before?"

"Yes."

"Was that to save a friend from shame, also?"

"No, it was not."

"Then what was it for?"

"It was because a friend of yours thought I would like a new sensation."

He stiffened at my words and a flush of anger suffused his ruddy cheeks, his violet eyes blazing almost black in his indignation.

"Leave this house!" he thundered.

Putting my hand into my waistcoat pocket I drew out his watch, and freeing it from its chain handed it to him.

"You may as well have this," I said. "I shouldn't care, after this, ever again to look upon its face, for fear that I would be reminded how unjust its donor is. Besides, it may serve whenever you see the inscription, to sting you just a trifle as you've stung me."

"Begone!" he roared, "and never show your insolent face again."

So, placing it upon the table, I went out without a word.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### DE PROFUNDIS

Now that my encounter with the doctor was over and the necessity for restraint had passed away, my fevered brain relapsed into its former state and again I sank into the land of dreams. I thought I was upon the waters in a frail boat whose timbers leaked, and bail as I would I could not gain upon the flood. I thought my Princess Ida was upon an island waiting for me. It seemed that she was beset with wild beasts and wilder men who lusted for her life, and that she thought that I was false to her because I was delayed. And so I worked with fevered haste, sweating at every pore, knowing that I could do it if only I had time enough and didn't have to go to prison for gambling. Standing ankle deep in my leaking boat I threw my arms to Heaven and wailed in my agony: "Bardilow, come back! Oh Bardilow, come back and tell them all!"

My cry recalled me to myself again, and I shivered, drawing my coat about my chest, for the night was cold.

And then again I thought I was upon a rocky ledge cut into the face of a frowning cliff, o'er

which the doctor had cast me in his rage. I clung with fearful and despairing fingers to the rock, and in my anguish called aloud:

“ Bardilow, come back! Oh Bardilow, come back and tell them all!”

Again my cry aroused me, and again I shivered, drawing my coat close, for the night was cold.

Then the fever must have returned for I thought I stood before a blazing house, and the fire scorched my face and head and hands, and my little lady was inside calling aloud for help, and I thought that I had placed her there, telling her to trust me for I was true to her and I would save her; and a cinder from the fire had escaped and somehow got inside my head, and burnt ferociously, shrivelling my brain.

I thought that Bardilow had been with me, and going off to Paris had —

Then a voice beside my ear awoke me to myself.

“ My little Prince, what ails you? Answer, for Hubert’s sake.”

Suddenly I recognised the kind face of Alec, and we were in King Street, Hammersmith, and his arm was round my neck, but how I got there I don’t know to this day.

“ Bardilow is in Paris. Why don’t he return?”

"My Prince," he said, in sore distress, "you're wandering and ill!"

"He knows everything, and he can put me right."

"Come, my boy," said Alec with great determination, "you're not fit to be about. You come home with me and get into your own old bed."

I recoiled from him in horror.

"No," I answered, in a panic.

"You shall!" he replied.

"Never," I said, stubbornly, "while she is there."

"While who is there?" he demanded.

"Flora Graham," I answered, shrinking back in terror.

"My little Prince," he said, in soothing tones, "she's gone, she's left us, suddenly and without a word."

After hearing that I went to sleep again.

Presently there came a time when the fire in my brain cooled, imperceptibly at first, then rapidly, and I ceased to dream of perils and I sank into a deep slumber which seemed to last a lifetime.

When finally I was thoroughly awake once more I realised to my astonishment that I was in my own bed in the doctor's house. There were two heads near the window. One was Alec's, and the other was covered with the beautiful chestnut locks that reminded me of my little lady. I

wasn't able to speak; I was so abominably weak that all I could do was just to move my lips and sigh a little louder than was usual. But Princess Ida heard me. She caught her little hands together, and seeing that my eyes were open, threw herself upon me and broke into a flood of tears, while Alec roared, "Thank God!"

Then my little lady crept quietly out of the room, sobbing as she went; and in a little while returned with Doctor Redcar, who looked at me and felt my pulse, and put a thermometer beneath my arm and gave me something to drink.

"He'll do now," he said. "Ye mustn't speak a word to him, either of ye, but just go quietly out and leave him to himself, and come back in about four hours, and when he wakes again just send for me at once."

So out they all trooped while I watched them languidly, too weak to speak, too tired to be inquisitive.

The days went by until I was a little stronger. My sweet Princess was allowed to sit with me alone and talk to me for twenty minutes. So holding my hand in both of hers, she told me that she loved me dearly, and was ashamed of herself because she had thought ill of me, and blamed herself for my condition.

"Oh, Jimmy dear! we know all about it now!"

Everything! Bardilow came back and told us all. Just as you had so often wished."

"Did he tell you all about the miniature?" I asked her, faintly.

"Everything, my poor, dear love," she answered, laying her head beside mine on the pillow. "Oh, Jimmy, I can never forgive myself for being so horrid and so jealous."

"What about the — er — the other matter?"

"He told us all about that too, and father was so angry with him. Oh! it was so noble of you, Jim, to shield him so."

Then she kissed me right upon the mouth, which did me much more good than all the sleep and medicine.

It was seven weeks before I was out of bed and seated in my little room with all my friends about me. Princess Ida was there and the doctor and Bardilow, and dear old Alec, and what one didn't know the other did, and so between them all I got the story link by link until it was complete.

"Jim, me bye," said the doctor, pointing to Alec, "there stands the best friend ever a man had, and the stoutest champion. Let me tell ye that."

"Ah," I smiled, "he's all right when you know him."

At which Alec stood upright, and with eyes that

gleamed with pleasure waved his arm towards the doctor.

“ The finest English gentleman that ever came out of Ireland,” he said.

“ Both of which titles were won long ago by this old boy,” said Bardilow, laying his hand affectionately upon my knee, “ for he is the best friend, the stoutest champion, and the finest gentleman that ever came out of —”

“ A pub,” I broke in, wishing to shut him up.

Then the doctor told me how Alec had come to him, telling him that I was ill and calling for Bardilow, and how he had refused to have anything to do with me, and how Alec had pleaded with him until the doctor, waxing wroth, had told him what a scamp I was and that he was done with me. At hearing which Alec had blazed at him and called him a liar, “ didn’t ye, Alec, ye ould blagyard? ” he asked.

“ Out upon me! aye, I did,” said Alec.

“ And a fool? ”

“ And eke a fool.”

“ And then I ordered him out of the house,” continued the doctor, “ at which he stormed at me, and said for all me eminence I couldn’t tell a big B from a bull’s foot, and he shamed me, Jim, with his loyalty to ye, let me tell ye that. And then I came and looked at ye, and saw that ye’d got brain

fever, and heard ye call for Bardilow, and prescribed for ye, and the constant calling for that scamp there," and he pointed to the famous surgeon, " got upon me mind so that I rung him up and found he'd just got back from Paris, and tould him what I'd done to ye, may God forgive me — and then, of course, I got the truth."

" Yes," said Bardilow, " if I could only have foreseen I'd never have taken you there, old chap."

" Lucky for you you did though, wasn't it? " I asked.

" Very, old chap, we pulled him through," and taking up the doctor's tale, " we got out the big car and scooted down to Hammersmith, and made an ambulance of it and brought you here, and if it hadn't been for me, you'd a snuffed it," and he wagged his head and winked.

" Ah, come out o' that! " said the doctor, on his mettle, " it was nothing at all to do with you."

" Everything to do with me," responded Bardilow, " because I put you right about the miniature, and brought little Ida round again so that she loved you again, Jim, and nursed you back to life."

" Did you nurse me all the time? " I asked my little lady, wonderingly.

"All the days, Jimmy dear, I was with you helping the nurse. Alec was your night nurse. He insisted on it."

"But what became of your job at the theatre, Alec?" I demanded.

"My job! My job did you say? Out upon you, Jim! Do you call that a job? Why your life's worth fifty jobs, my boy, thousands of jobs such as that!" he replied, vehemently.

On hearing which I felt extremely humble and very, very thankful and couldn't speak.

"Of course you went to the photographer's?" I finally inquired.

"Rather!" said Bardilow. "We soon tripped Flora Graham up on that score."

"And you explained about the frame?"

"Yes."

"What about Miss Purvis? Did you get anything out of her?"

"Everything, my boy," replied the doctor. "She heard it all, and she's no lover of a scheming woman without modesty, let me tell you that."

"Then everything is clear," I said, pleased beyond belief, "except the inscriptions. You'll have to take my word for that."

"Your word," responded Bardilow, scornfully, "your word isn't worth a tinker's cuss. You wouldn't tell the truth about the night club so of course you wouldn't be believed about the in-

scription. Doctor Redcar, is the credit of this due to me or is it not?"

"Yours, me bye, entirely," replied the other.

"Well," continued Bardilow, "we put two and two together and they fitted well enough, in places, where they hadn't been trimmed round, but all the same it didn't clear you sufficiently for my mind, so I hunted round your table here and spent hours, I should think, upon your blotting pad trying to see if I could find any of it among the blots and streaks, and after a while I found it — 'From' — and then a space, then 'Jim,' and underneath — the rest — a lot of it obscured of course, but it's your rotten, bad writing that gave her the chance, old chap."

I smiled in my content and squeezed my little lady's hand, more glad than I could tell to think he'd paid me back so handsomely, and after a bit he found the blotter for me and holding it reversed against the mirror showed me my original inscription.

"You saved my honour, old chap," he said, "but I've given you back your own!"

And later, when the doctor thought it time for me to go to bed, he stood before me very humbly, and holding out my watch looked wistfully and lovingly into my eyes.

"Jimmy, my son," he pleaded, "will ye do me a favour and take it back? It's a real good watch."

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE DAWNING OF A BETTER DAY

A FEW days later Mr. Graham asked for a private interview. He apologised for the brusqueness and brutality with which he'd cross-examined me, giving as his excuse a father's love for his only child. He told me that the evidence seemed very black indeed until he came to test it, when the case had toppled over like a house of cards. He had been astonished by his daughter's attitude and was unable to guess at her motive. In his anger and disgust he'd packed her off to Scotland, where she was to remain in the custody of an aunt until she showed a return to reason. And he entreated me most earnestly to spare her for her mother's sake, who was an invalid and might be killed by any publicity. I told him that so long as I did not see her again she was free to do just as she pleased, for all I wanted now was to forget her. He thanked me very gratefully, and offered his future services if I should need them at any time, and there the matter rested.

But there was one thing I was determined upon. I wouldn't give the miniature to Princess Ida, much as she desired it, nor yet the frame; so one

evening together we deposited each relic of Flora Graham's treachery within the fire, piece by piece. Instead I gave her the butterfly in brilliants with eyes so like her own, and, though it was such a long time after her birthday, it was none the less acceptable because of that, and we swore a dreadful oath together that come what might, she would never more doubt my love and constancy. Nor would I ever again have a secret which she did not share. Furthermore she promised to marry me just as soon as Fortune condescended to throw Beppo across my path.

But I never referred to that unfortunate little bit of ribbon, and neither did she.

The next thing that happened was the return of Vanderdocken, full of pride because my salon and academy exhibits had earned great praise and what is better, sold extremely well; and superintended all arrangements for my autumn show, and wouldn't let me do a thing but just recuperate, and rebuild my wasted tissues.

My exhibition opened in the fall and collectors, critics and the curious swarmed to them. Alec was installed at a little covered table just inside the gallery, and took tickets and disposed of catalogues, and booked orders for engravings, and many people thought he was the artist, so well did he suit the part with his flowing hair, and flowing tie, and ever flowing tongue.

To celebrate my *début* the dear old doctor went about and invited all he knew and many whom he didn't to meet me at a dinner at his house in the street off Cavendish Square, and I can't say now who was the happiest and the proudest there, my little lady or myself. This mild species of entertainment wasn't enough for Bardilow, however. He was all on fire to give me what he considered a more befitting send off, so he invited all who took an interest in me to have a real night out with him, allowing him to set the pace, and not to be inquisitive as to the order of the revelries. The doctor agreed to come and Vanderdocken, and Alec, and we rung up Dicky Day and got his acceptance. And we fitted Alec with a hired evening suit and bought a high and shiny hat for him, which gladdened his old heart so that he was near to tears with the intensity of his joy and thankfulness.

Our host marshalled us into a celebrated hotel where we sat at a table within a screened recess, while a tubby waiter bestowed on us all his skilled attention. I think I never ate a meal that I might have enjoyed so much, greatly on account of the generous appreciation my friends lavished on me, every one without exception; but though they did their very best to hearten me, I was somewhat unresponsive because though I stood upon the very pinnacle of fame, there was one thing wanting to

complete my happiness, and that one thing was — Beppo.

Beppo, who, as it were, held for me the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; Beppo, within whose black and sin stained heart was locked the secret of my parentage; Beppo, the much sought after; Beppo, the wary, the elusive, and the indispensable; Beppo — the only man who knew!

So I yearned for Beppo almost as much as I had at one time yearned for Bardilow, yearned for him with a passionate longing, yearned to have his dirty throat within my hand that, squeezing it, I might extract the knowledge that I sought. He was the one corroborative link without which my chain of happiness must be always incomplete. So I listened to their quips and merry jests and smiled with as much of heart as I could muster, and responded to their toasts and tried my very best to act my part of honoured guest.

Presently the meal being over we all of us got into Bardilow's car, a four seater. We were eight, including the chauffeur. How we did it I don't know but I distinctly remember that one was upon the footboard, and another rode astride the bonnet. Thus curiously grouped we drove off to a music hall in time for the latter half of the programme and I forgot my spectres in the absurdities I listened to, and by the time we came out was as joyous as the rest of them. Then we bundled

once more into the panting, overburdened car and drove through London town, singing choruses we'd lately heard, and even Justus Vanderdocken and the doctor for once forgot their dignity, so infectious was the gaiety of Bardilow.

Our way led back to the Connaught rooms, where we went for another toast before closing time, and we stayed so long that they turned us out and when Vanderdocken proposed to go home to bed Bardilow refused to listen to him, and bundled him, protesting, back into the car. We rolled on through the deserted streets until we stopped, before the dove toned portals of the Royal Automobile Club in staid Pall Mall. Here although all the respectable members had long since retired for the night, so that there were none about but those who'd come in by the later trains, Bardilow bustled about whispering first to one official and then to another, until presently we were escorted down into the bowels of the earth to join him in a Turkish bath, which he said would refresh us and make us fit to appreciate a little supper he had ordered for us at half past two!

The majority made haste to get it over, but Bardilow and I, because he was my host and I his guest of honour, made more of it and dawdled through the temperatures until we came to the massage slabs, when, after much debate, he insisted on my going first, there being but one at-

tendant on account of the late hour. I was anxious to get it over quickly so I threw myself face downwards on the marble slab, for all the world like a victim prepared for sacrifice. When my shoulders and my spine had been well rubbed and stroked and pounded, all in silence, I turned myself upon my back that the rest of me might receive a like attention, and looked for the first time into my attendant's face. His skin was olive and his eyes as black as sloes, his gleaming teeth shone down at me from out a fierce moustache of sable hue in such a manner that I started from the slab as if I'd seen a ghost.

He looked at me and I at him.

"Beppo!" I gasped, hoarsely, reaching out to clutch him.

"Holy smoke; who is it? Hey!" he exclaimed, backing away from me. "It can't be Sir Edward — it is not old enough — it can't be —"

"It's Jim," I said, triumphantly, catching at his wrist.

But the soap upon his hands made him as slippery as an eel, so that giving his arm a sudden twist he was free, and before I could restrain him was running back into the hot rooms.

"Stop him, Bardilow!" I shouted. "It's Beppo!"

My host required no second bidding and throw-

ing his arms about Beppo held him tight till I came up, and added my persuasions to his own.

Then Beppo collapsed, and sinking to his knees clasped me about the loins.

“ Mistaire Lorrilow,” he cried, with starting eyes, “ I did not do it. I swear by all the saints I did not do it!”

“ Do what?” I asked.

“ Keel your moder, Jim. I did not do it. It was not me.”

“ Oh, that’s all right,” I said. “ I know you didn’t, and what is better I know who did.”

At which he stared, dumfounded, with his jaw dropped down.

“ But all the same,” I continued, “ I’ve got you, and I shan’t let you escape me again.”

He began to struggle once more at this and begged for mercy, pleading that he hadn’t meant to blackmail her but he was very poor.

“ Oh,” I protested, “ don’t bother yourself about that, that’s dead. I’m not going to hurt you.”

“ What of William?” he gasped, fully conquered.

“ He’s dead,” I replied.

“ An’ John Sturgess?”

“ Dead, too, but never mind them. You are the only man who can tell me whether I am Sir Edward Lorrilow’s son or not.”

"You are, Mistaire Jim. I swear you are."

"Thank God!" I answered. "Was he married to my mother?"

"I t'ink he was, but I could not say for sure."

"You think he was, how's that?"

"Because it 'appen up in Scotland."

"Was John Sturgess's wife my mother?"

"Yes. Who you t'ink was, hey?"

"What makes you think they were married?"

"Oh, it was all ver' foolish. Your fader ask her for be 'is wife. She say, 'Yes, alright,' an' Mister Graham say dey was married."

"Mister who?" I almost shouted, recalling Flora Graham's boast that my father and hers were once friends.

"Graham."

"What Graham?"

"Oh, he ver' great friend of your fader's and he is lawyer. He knows."

We took our prisoner to the great swimming bath where the doctor was racing with Dicky Day, and beckoning to Doctor Redcar and Alec, and begging the others excuse us for a while, we returned to the massage slabs, explaining our errand as we went. There we sat upon the slab in solemn session, for all the world like ghosts upon a gravestone; while Beppo, being assured of our amiable intentions towards him, told us all the tale of my mother's marriage.

“Sir Edward Lorrilow,” he said, “’e was always ver’ fond of your moder, Mistaire Jim, and she lofe him, ah — oh, so ver’ much! But she was what you call — ver’ free — was Matilda. Ever’body lofe your moder and she — lofe ever’-body! She lofe John Sturgess, she lofe me, but she lofe Mistaire Edward better dan all of ’em. De Lorrilows always spend de Autumn in Scotland at ’er ladyship’s fader’s, for de shooting, an’ that year Mistaire Edward ’e come of age — ’e was twenty-one, see! And dey gave a big dance up-stairs an’ anoder down-stairs in de servants’ ’all. In de middle of it Mistaire Edward an’ Mistaire Graham dey go down an’ dance wid de servants. Dey was both what you might call a little fresh,— full of fun and want to lark about. Mistaire Edward, ’e take your mother’s ’and an’ ’e say, ‘Dis is de girl what I goin’ to marry,’ an’ ’e kiss ’er right dere — before all of us, an’ den ’e ’old ’er ’and an’ say to ’er: ‘Will you ’ave me for your ’usband, Matilda, an’ be Lady Lorrilow when de ole man’s croaked?’ an’ Matilda she look pretty, an’ blush, an’ laugh — an’ say, ‘Oh Mistaire Edward! yes, if you will ’ave me for your wife,’ an’ den ’e kiss ’er, an’ den she ’ide ’er face an’ giggle an’ run away from ’im. Mistaire Graham look ver’ serious an’ say, ‘Of course you don’t mean it, Ted?’ Mistaire Edward say, ‘Mean it! of course I mean it, an’ we’ll ’ave it all

proper w'en we get back to town.' Den Mistaire Graham take 'im by de arm an' lead 'im to de door. ' Ted, you silly fool!' Mistaire Graham say. ' You're in Scotland now. You've married 'er!' Mistaire Edward say 'e know what 'e's about, 'e's goin' to 'ave Matilda for 'is wife an' he don't give a Goddam wot 'appens.' Your moder an' Mistaire Edward dey arrange to 'ave it done proper in town an' den 'er ladyship she find out someding, an' Matilda she is sent away, an' Mistaire Edward 'e goes off to Italy an' I go wid 'im — I was 'is valet. After a bit 'e forget all about Matilda an' marry an American lady, an' poor Matilda — because she was in trouble — she marry John Sturgess who want 'er ver' bad, an' den you come. Ole Sir James die, an' Sir Edward say 'e like Italy so much 'e going to stop dere — an' dere you are."

When he'd finished his amazing tale the doctor slapped him on his bare back, and told him he was a brick, and asked him if he'd come and see Mister Graham with us the next day. He consented provided he could get the time off. Bardilow wrote out a cheque for fifty pounds on a slip of the Club note paper, and told Beppo it was his as soon as he had faced Sir Edward Lorrilow with me, at which my Alec's 'black browed varlet of a foreign hue' said he'd come whether he could get the time or not.

So we arranged that he should dress and come home with us, and, searching out our friends, apologised for leaving them so long, and finding supper ready sat down to it.

Never will I forget that feast as long as life is in me; for one thing I was, at last, supremely happy because that Beppo had come back out of the murk of years, when most I wanted him and when least I had expected him. The others rejoiced in my happiness and we were all very jolly indeed.

We sat around the board in bath robes, some pure white and others crimson edged, with sandals on our feet, and so real was the impression made on some of us that Alec stood upright, with the end of his robe across his shoulder, toga fashion, pure white against the purple background of the bath, and lifting his lean, bare arm above his white and fluffy head, proposed a toast in this fashion:

“Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears,  
I rise to drink to Jim here, and to praise him;  
The evil that men do lives after them,  
The good is oft interred with their bones.  
Let this not be with Jimmy,  
For he has done of evil none at all,  
And evil be to him who thinks he has.”

“Bravo! Bravo!” cried Bardilow, “that’s ripping stuff, old chap,” and getting up he clinked his glass with mine, at which they all followed suit.

I was hilariously happy. I laughed the loudest

of them all. I drank with them and they with me and, strange as it may seem, my Alec turned into two Alecs, not solid ones, but a pair of misty, evanescent forms that merged and separated even as I looked; and sometimes I caught myself laughing when there really wasn't cause for it, and all because my heart was full to overflowing with rapture and with thankfulness. After a while I caught them winking at each other knowingly, and tried to tax them with conspiracy, but the words refused to come. Looking out across the bath I saw great rectangular patches of vivid blue beyond the leaded windows, and standing upon the form with Bardilow's arm supporting me, I placed my sandalled foot upon the table and commanding their attention pointed to that patch of morning sky.

"One more toast," I cried, exultingly. "The dawning of a better day."

## CHAPTER XX

### RESTITUTION

BEPRO told us his story the next morning, the story of a roving life, a story full of poverty and hardship, and vain regrets for opportunities gone beyond recall. He told us how Sir Edward had kicked him in his cups, and how he, in a burst of Southern passion, had knifed him in the neck; he told us of his flight, his "dog days" as a steward on an ocean tramp, his eventual arrival at a Devon port, his search for work, his hiding in the woods at Ravenhurst, waiting and watching for Lady Lorrilow that she might buy his silence, for he was desperate.

He grinned self-consciously as he recalled my falling over him, the start of vicious anger that followed his surprise, his triumphant glee as he recognised my likeness to my father, his meeting with Bill Blay and how his cupidity had been aroused on learning how that reprobate bought comfort with his silence.

He described his panic at the murder, his life among the gypsies, his subsequent arrival here in London and the priest at the Italian church in Hat-

ton Garden, whose kindly influence had obtained for him his present post as bath attendant.

Very cunningly he mentioned the advertisements, of how he had seen them a score of times but refused to be lured into the net. It was at this point I promised should I ever come into my own that I would reinstate him in the service he had lost, that he would be my valet as he once had been my father's.

After a while we bundled him into the doctor's car, and having seen Graham and told him of our discovery we waited in his outer office while he arranged his work, so that he might go down to Ravenhurst with us. He seemed really glad to do this and we started on the journey with light hearts.

"Mister Graham," said the doctor, as we sped along through Guildford, "what is the position of the parties?"

"Doctor Redcar," replied the man of law, "Mister Lorrilow here is the legal son of Sir Edward and direct heir to all the Lorrilow estates. My poor, misguided daughter was the first to see it. She'd often heard me speak of the affair and she saw a resemblance between Jim and a photograph his father gave me when I made his acquaintance at Oxford. It was then that her ambition overcame her better feelings, and she determined to marry Jim because of it. But that's all

past and done with now and she's getting over it. I recognised Jim, too, of course, but resemblance isn't evidence. There must be something more than a mere likeness — which may be accidental after all, and I knew nothing of Jim's history because Flora kept it all to herself. Sir Edward was a verra wild young mon, much too free with the lassies at all times. Ye see he was spoilt, being an only child. When he played that mad prank o' getting marriet to yer mother, Mister Lorrilow, I warned him it was a valid and binding marriage, though irregular, but he was fond of her and she of him and it was done quite openly before all those witnesses, and he never once attempted to disclaim it. So of course our young friend here completes the evidence of their intention. It was what we call in Scottish law a marriage *per verba de præsenti*. It could have been ratified afterwards if the parties willed; but such ratification was not necessary."

"Then what about her marriage to John Sturgess?" I asked.

"Bigamous, sir, and done to save her name when his mother packed him off."

"Then she must have been —" I gasped.

"Ah, come out o' that!" broke in the doctor, "we're not here to discuss yer mother's honour, Jim, but your parentage, and that's established beyond a doubt. Am I right, Mister Graham?"

"Absolutely," replied the lawyer.

"Then what about Sir Edward's American wife that I met in Italy?" I persisted.

"No more his wife than she is mine," replied Mister Graham. "In view of the undoubted validity of the former contract his union with her was bigamous, and that was the reason for his living his life in Italy. The auld lady was as proud as Lucifer when, after a month or so, he tauld her what he'd done and that he intended to marry your mother again in London. She packed the lassie off without a moment's notice, and dared him to have anything more to do with her. Lady Lorrilow was such an unforgiving wumman that when a year or two afterwards he married this American girl she told him if he ever came to England again in her lifetime she'd put the police upon his track for contracting a bigamous marriage. Och! she was a gey bitter wumman was your grandmother, Meester Lorrilow. And so the puir, weak mon stayed in Italy till his mother died. Though it makes no deeference in law whether he acknowledges you or not, Meester Lorrilow, it's a pleasure to me to try and make him do so, as I'm the only mon who ever had any influence with him of a', and I can never forget your generosity towards my puir, misguided dochter."

We went by the way of Winchester and then on to Lyndhurst. We halted there and had our din-

ner at the old Elizabethan hotel while the chauffeur put the hood in place and bought a fresh supply of petrol. After our meal we were off again, ploughing through the mud and driving rain, our path illuminated by vivid veins of lightning, while the growl and grumble of the thunder sounded to me like the anger of the Lord poured upon my father's head. When we passed the Goat and Compasses I pointed out to Doctor Redcar the spot where I was born, and told him that should I ever come back here as Lord of Ravenhurst, I'd pull the old house down, leaving the cellar exactly as it used to be in memory of the comfort I had derived from its fantastic gloom, and on its site build another house, a private one, wherein Alec and his wife, with the remnant of the dogs and cats and my canary, might end their days in peace and comfort.

The storm was raging furiously as we drove up to the gates of Ravenhurst, the wind moaning and howling through the giant trees that lined the drive, shaking them as in a passion; and finding the entrance locked we were obliged to ring the bell and wait the pleasure of the lodge-keeper.

George Pond's hard-hewn face was wreathed in oily smiles when he came out into the rain to open the gate.

“Is Sir Edward at home?” asked Mister

Graham, putting out his head. "I'm Mister Graham. You know me, I think."

"I'm sorry, Mister Graham, but Sir Edward is not home, sir!" replied the lodgekeeper, looking genuinely concerned. "He hasn't been home for weeks, sir. He spends his time upon his yacht which is moored off Sidmouth, sir."

"How long has he been gone?"

"Some weeks now, sir. Ever since he had an encounter with a poacher and got rather badly hurt, sir."

At hearing which I smiled, for I thought I could tell him something about that poacher.

"Oh," said Mister Graham, stepping out into the rain and motioning to me to follow him, "I've brought his son home."

As I stood before him, George Pond grew pale, then recovering from his astonishment, bowed low.

"Your servant, Mister James," he said.

We sped on again through Dorchester and Bridport, round by Lyme Regis, down the hairpin bends of Trow Hill with brakes jammed hard, and into Sidmouth.

Here the storm was raging more furious than ever, the waves dashed up against the red cliffs and washed across the primitive esplanade so that half the front was under water. Rain and spray commingled beat with stinging force against our faces as we stood at the foot of the simple lantern,

gazing out into the mist. Great banks of clouds, heavy with rain, reached down their ragged edges to the boiling, raging sea, which threw up great, grey claws as if to clutch them. The wind shrieked about our ears as we leant forward the better to withstand its force, our overcoats and mackintoshes flapping 'tween our knees.

But no sign of a yacht was there.

The ragged edges of a cloud more venturesome than those preceding came low upon the boiling sea, and rushed eastward with resistless force.

"Look!" I shrieked within the doctor's ear.  
"A waterspout!"

Then another followed in its wake, and when at last they'd spent themselves they scattered and dissolved in such a tossing burst of spume that I quailed to think what fate awaited mariners whose frail craft met such phenomena as this.

A light flashed out.

Beppo clutched my arm with trembling intensity.

"Rockets, Mister Jim," he shouted. "A ship is on the rocks!"

So jumping in the car again we wormed our way amid the scurrying throng of Devon heroes, who, heedless of their lives and limbs, went up the top of Dunscombe cliffs, eager to succour those whose signal of distress they had seen.

Arrived upon the summit we saw a crowd who,

regardless of the risk of landslides, had sent a line down the face of the cliff. They were pointing out to one another the evanescent outlines of a snow white yacht beyond the sentinel rock, fast settling by the bows.

"My God!" I cried. "We've come too late."

The ferocity of the gale was such that even shouting was a mockery, so in silence we stood, battling to keep our feet, until a signal on the rope informed those sturdy men of Devon that the man who had gone down was coming back. They pulled lustily upon the rope, working with a rhythm and a swing, until, at last, there appeared above the edge the head and shoulders of a sailor. He was carrying a burden.

We edged our way over to look upon them and I saw with a tightening of the nerves and a hideous contraction of the throat, that the rescued man was Sir Edward Lorrilow. I only had a moment to look at him before the doctor had gathered him up and striding to the car laid him on a seat. We drove to an inn, while another Devon man descended into Hell.

Thus it happened that when I met my father once more face to face he was lying bandaged and strapped, in his bed.

"Ted," asked Mister Graham, "do you know me?"

"Ah, Donald," sighed the other, "I'm done for! Who else was saved?"

"Not a soul," replied the lawyer, sadly.

"My God, what a storm!" exclaimed the stricken man. "I thought I was dead!"

"Ted, old mon," hastily broke in the man of law, "the Lord has given ye a chance to repair yer wrongs and wipe out all yer little weaknesses."

"How?" asked the other, eagerly.

"Acknowledge yer son," he replied, placing me within Sir Edward's view.

My father looked at me a little frightened, and then he set his jaw defiantly, eyeing me with much dislike, but a twinge of mortal agony seizing upon him caused him to writhe in anguish, and when the paroxysm had subsided his petulence and defiance had vanished.

"Jim," he said, faintly, reaching out his hand to me, "you are my lawful son and legal heir, as God in Heaven sees me."

Saying which he sighed yet once again, and went out to face his Judge.

## CHAPTER XXI

### I RECOVER MY RIBBON

“ My sweet Princess,” I murmured, softly, taking her hands within my own, “ Prince Arthur lays at your lovely feet his name, his wealth, and his honour. Will you have me ? ”

“ Are you sure it’s all right, Jimmy ? ” she answered, placing her soft, young arms about my shoulders. “ It seems almost too good to be true ! ”

“ Marjery,” I replied, gazing deep into her glorious violet eyes, “ we have bought our happiness with pain. But, indeed, dear, pain and sorrow shared as ours has been is happiness unending.”

“ I — I have a secret I have kept from you, Jimmy,” she confessed.

“ Is it a very dreadful secret, my own ? ”

“ I suppose it was horrid of me.— I don’t know what you’ll say to me,” she stammered.

“ Of course I’m going to be frightfully angry,” I replied, smothering her with kisses. “ I shall stamp and storm and fume and rage, and tell you that I never wish to see your face again, and then

when I have frightened you to tears, I'll very graciously forgive you. What is it?"

Taking my hand in hers she led me out of the drawing room and up the stairs to her own little boudoir, into which no one had ever entered but her father.

"Th-there it is, Jimmy," she said, pointing to the wall.

I followed the direction of her hand, and there, to my intense surprise, beheld my broken pistol pieced together carefully. It hung on the wall and it hung by that piece of ribbon I had worn within my little bag of oiled silk.

"Why where on earth did you get that from?" I asked amazed. "I always thought that Flora Graham had stolen that."

"No, Jimmy dear," she said, coming very close and laying her lovely head upon my shoulder. "I took it — on the night of the soirée — while you were asleep in the carriage. A wicked impulse came upon me, and I opened the bag and took it away from you."

"But why, my sweetest pet? Why?" I demanded.

"Oh, Jimmy, I was such a cruel little beast!" she cried, looking up at me with eyes that brimmed with tears. "I — I took it because I thought it would hurt you, because I thought you didn't love me any more. I hoped when you missed it you'd

think that — that other girl had taken it and want it again, and perhaps grow to love me. When you never mentioned it I was afraid to tell you. You're not cross with me are you, Jimmy dear?"

"My sweet Princess," I answered, folding her close within my arms, "how could any one ever have the heart to be cross with you!"

And so standing in front of the broken pistol and the ribbon, the souvenirs of our childish affection and the mementos of our maturer love, we kissed once again.

THE END

Miss Banks  
Mrs Green  
Mrs Johnson  
Miss Palmer

affection







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